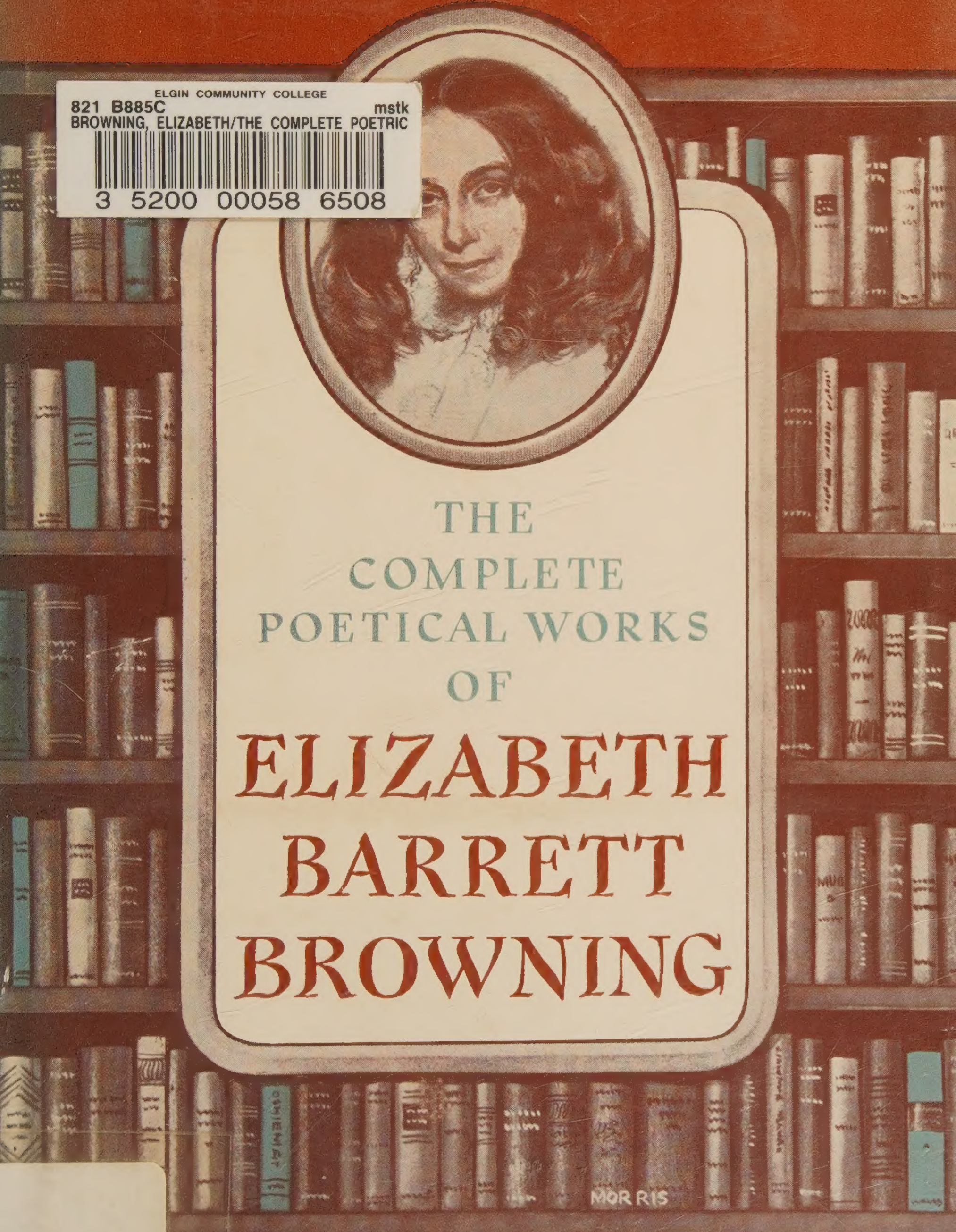
ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
821 B885C mstk
BROWNING, ELIZABETH/THE COMPLETE POETRIC
3 5200 00058 6508



THE COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Cambridge Edition

The Complete Works of

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

There will always be a place in English literature for Elizabeth Barrett Browning, most famous for the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* which she wrote to Robert Browning during their courtship. No sweeter love poetry could be imagined, and Robert Browning declared them "the finest Sonnets in any language since Shakespeare."

An invalid from adolescence, Elizabeth Barrett made books and poetry her world, and found in poetry a way to express her idealistic and romantic soul.

In 1844 two volumes of poems, which formed the basis for all later editions of her works, appeared, and when the young poet Robert Browning read them he wrote, "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett . . . and I love you, too." The story of Elizabeth Barrett and her poetry was from then on the story of her love for Robert Browning. In their marriage — heartily opposed by the tyrannical Mr. Barrett — the Brownings found supreme happiness and inspiration.

Jacket by John V. Morris

M01 40001 05511

821 27586
B885c Browning, Elizabeth Barrett
Complete poetical works

LIBRARY
ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ELGIN, ILLINOIS
DEMCO

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/completepoetical0000hes

The Cambridge Poets

	edited by
BROWNING	Horace E. Scudder
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING	Harriet Waters Preston
BURNS	W. E. Henley
BYRON	Paul E. More
CHAUCER	F. N. Robinson
DRYDEN	George R. Noyes
ENGLISH AND SCOTTISH POPULAR BALLADS	Helen Child Sargent, George L. Kittredge
HOLMES	Horace E. Scudder
KEATS	Horace E. Scudder
LONGFELLOW	Horace E. Scudder
AMY LOWELL	———
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL	Horace E. Scudder
MILTON	Harris Francis Fletcher
POPE	Henry W. Boynton
SCOTT	Horace E. Scudder
SHAKESPEARE	William Allan Neilson
SHELLEY	George E. Woodberry
SPENSER	R. E. Neil Dodge
TENNYSON	William J. Rolfe
THOREAU	Henry Seidel Canby
WHITTIER	Horace E. Scudder
WORDSWORTH	A. J. George

The Cambridge Edition of the Poets

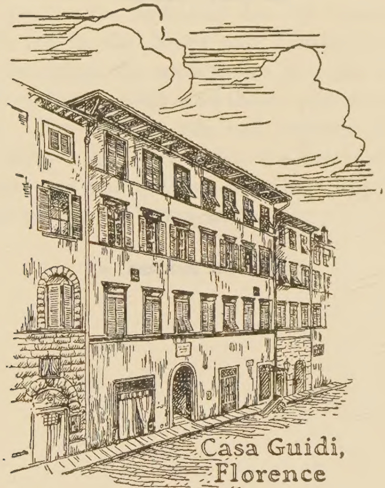
MRS. BROWNING

EDITED BY

HARRIET WATERS PRESTON

The Complete Poetical Works of

MRS. BROWNING



Casa Guidi, Florence

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY BOSTON

Cambridge Edition

RENNER LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER
ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ELGIN, ILLINOIS

821
B884c

COPYRIGHT, 1900, BY HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND CO.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

EIGHTEENTH PRINTING C

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

027586

EDITOR'S NOTE

The text followed in this edition is that of the latest comprehensive English edition, and as Mrs. Browning sought to give more than ordinary weight to certain words and phrases, her italicizing and capitalization have been followed. A few of her early and merely experimental essays in versification have been omitted from the *Appendix*, but it has been thought advisable to reprint there certain prose studies which disclose, quite as surely as the poetry written at the same time, the intellectual tastes of the writer, and give an interesting illustration of the development of her mind.

In accordance with the general plan of the Cambridge editions, the headnotes to poems and groups of poems are restricted for the most part to biographical and bibliographical detail, but in the Notes and Illustrations in the *Appendix*, the editor of the volume has taken the opportunity to make some survey of those characteristics of Mrs. Browning's poetry and those qualities of her mind which especially distinguish her. For this she has had recourse in some particulars to the recently published *Letters*. Her own notes are marked by brackets. The explicatory notes of passages are mainly those contributed by Mrs. Browning herself to the successive volumes of her published work.

H. E. S.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH . . . xi

THE SERAPHIM, AND OTHER POEMS.

The Seraphim.

Part the First 1
Part the Second 5
Epilogue 13

The Poet's Vow.

Part the First, showing wherefore the Vow was made . . 14
Part the Second, showing to whom the Vow was declared . . 15
Part the Third, showing how the Vow was kept 17
Part the Fourth, showing how Rosalind fared by the keeping of the Vow 18
Part the Fifth, showing how the Vow was broken . . . 19
The Romaunt of Margret . . 20
Isobel's Child 23
A Romance of the Ganges . . 29
An Island 32
The Deserted Garden . . . 34
The Soul's Travelling . . . 35
Sounds 38
Night and the Merry Man . . 39
Earth and her Praisers . . . 40
The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus 43
To Bettine 45
Felicia Hemans 46
Memory and Hope 47
The Sleep 48
Man and Nature 48
A Sea-Side Walk 49
The Sea-Mew 49
The Little Friend 50
My Doves 51
To Mary Russell Mitford . . 52
The Student 52
The Exile's Return 53
A Song against Singing . . . 53
Stanzas 54
The Young Queen 54
PAGE
Victoria's Tears 55
Vanities 56
Bereavement 56
Consolation 56
A Supplication for Love, Hymn I. 57
The Mediator, Hymn II. . . 57
The Weeping Saviour, Hymn III. . 58
The Measure, Hymn IV. . . 58
Cowper's Grave 58
The Weakest Thing . . . 60
The Pet-Name 60
'Since without Thee we do no good' 61
Queen Annelida and False Arcite 61
The Complaint of Annelida to False Arcite 65

POEMS OF 1844.

A Drama of Exile.

Scene — The Outer Side of the Gate of Eden 67
Scene — The Extremity of the Sword-glare 72
Scene — A Wild Open Country . 79

Sonnets.

The Soul's Expression . . . 98
The Seraph and Poet . . . 98
On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon 98
Past and Future 98
Irreparableness 99
Tears 99
Grief 99
Substitution 99
Comfort 99
Perplexed Music 100
Work 100
Futurity 100
The Two Sayings 100
The Look 101
The Meaning of the Look . . 101
A Thought for a Lonely Death-Bed 101
Work and Contemplation . . 101
Pain in Pleasure 101
An Apprehension 102
Discontent 102

  Patience taught by Nature 102
  Cheerfulness taught by Reason 102
  Exaggeration 103
  Adequacy 103
  To George Sand — A Desire 103
  To George Sand — A Recognition 103
  The Prisoner 103
  Insufficiency 104
The Romaunt of the Page 104
The Lay of the Brown Rosary.
  First Part 108
  Second Part 110
  Third Part 113
  Fourth Part 115
The Mourning Mother 116
A Valediction 117
Lady Geraldine's Courtship 118
  Conclusion 126
A Vision of the Poets 127
  Conclusion 138
Rhyme of the Duchess May 140
  The Rhyme 141
  Conclusion 148
The Lady's 'Yes' 149
The Poet and the Bird 149
The Lost Bower 149
A Child Asleep 155
The Cry of the Children 156
Crowned and Wedded 158
Crowned and Buried 160
To Flush, My Dog 163
The Fourfold Aspect 164
A Flower in a Letter 166
The Cry of the Human 167
A Lay of the Early Rose 169
Bertha in the Lane 171
That Day 174
Loved Once 174
A Rhapsody of Life's Progress 175
L. E. L.'s Last Question 178
The House of Clouds 179
Catarina to Camoens 181
A Portrait 182
Sleeping and Watching 183
Wine of Cyprus 184
The Romance of the Swan's Nest 186
Lessons from the Gorse 187
The Dead Pan 188

POEMS OF 1850.

The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point 192
Hector in the Garden 195
Sonnets.
  Flush or Faunus 196
  Finite and Infinite 197
  Two Sketches 197
  Mountaineer and Poet 197
  The Poet 198
  Hiram Powers' 'Greek Slave' 198
  Life 198
  Love 198
  Heaven and Earth 199
  The Prospect 199
  Hugh Stuart Boyd.
    His Blindness 199
    His Death 199
    Legacies 200
Confessions 200
A Sabbath Morning at Sea 201
The Mask 202
Calls on the Heart 203
Wisdom Unapplied 204
Human Life's Mystery 205
A Child's Thought of God 206
The Claim 206
A Dead Rose 207
A Woman's Shortcomings 207
A Man's Requirements 208
A Year's Spinning 209
Change upon Change 209
A Reed 209
A Child's Grave at Florence 210
Life and Love 211
A Denial 212
Proof and Disproof 212
Question and Answer 213
Inclusions 213
Insufficiency 214

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE 214

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS.

Part I. 224
Part II. 242

AURORA LEIGH.

Dedication to John Kenyon 254
First Book 254
Second Book 270
Third Book 288
Fourth Book 306
Fifth Book 324
Sixth Book 342
Seventh Book 360
Eighth Book 379
Ninth Book 396

POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS.

Napoleon III. in Italy 410
The Dance 415
A Tale of Villafranca 416
A Court Lady 417
An August Voice 419
Christmas Gifts 420
Italy and the World 421

A Curse for a Nation.
Prologue 423
The Curse 423

LAST POEMS.
Little Mattie 425
A False Step 426
Void in Law 426
Lord Walter's Wife 427
Bianca among the Nightingales . 428
My Kate 430
A Song for the Ragged Schools of London 431
May's Love 432
Amy's Cruelty 433
My Heart and I 433
The Best Thing in the World . 434
Where 's Agnes? 434
De Profundis 436
A Musical Instrument . . . 437
First News from Villafranca . 438
King Victor Emanuel entering Florence, April, 1860 439
The Sword of Castruccio Castracani 440
Summing up in Italy 440
'Died . . .' 441
The Forced Recruit 442
Garibaldi 442
Only a Curl 443
A View across the Roman Campagna 444
The King's Gift 445
Parting Lovers 445
Mother and Poet 446
Nature's Remorses 448
The North and the South . . 450

TRANSLATIONS.
Prometheus Bound 450
A Lament for Adonis, from the Greek of Bion 468
Song of the Rose, attributed to Sappho 470
From Theocritus.
The Cyclops 471
From Apuleius.
Psyche gazing on Cupid . . . 472
Psyche wafted by Zephyrus . 473
Psyche and Pan 473
Psyche propitiating Ceres . 474
Psyche and the Eagle . . . 475
Psyche and Cerberus 475
Psyche and Proserpine . . . 475
Psyche and Venus 476
Mercury carries Psyche to Olympus 476
Marriage of Psyche and Cupid . 476
From Nonnus.
How Bacchus finds Ariadne sleeping 476
How Bacchus comforts Ariadne 477
From Hesiod.
Bacchus and Ariadne 478
From Euripides.
Aurora and Tithonus . . . 479
From Homer.
Hector and Andromache . . 479
The Daughters of Pandarus . 481
Another Version 481
From Anacreon.
Ode to the Swallow . . . 481
From Heine.
The Last Translation . . 482

APPENDIX.
I. Juvenilia.
The Battle of Marathon.
Book I. 485
Book II. 488
Book III. 492
Book IV. 496
An Essay on Mind.
Analysis of the First Book . 499
Book I. 499
Analysis of the Second Book . 505
Book II. 506
II. Some Account of the Greek Christian Poets 513
III. Notes and Illustrations . . 532

INDEX OF FIRST LINES . . . 543
INDEX OF TITLES 546

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

'Elizabeth Barrett Moulton Barrett, daughter and first child of Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett, of Coxhoe Hall, native of St. James's Jamaica, by Mary, late Clarke, native of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was borne March 6th 1806, and baptized 10th of February 1808.'

Such is the entry in the register of the parish church of Kelloe, a small village in the county of Durham, England, about five miles south of the Cathedral town of the same name. The event thus recorded took place at the seat of the child's paternal uncle, Samuel Barrett Moulton, M. P., and her unusual wealth of *cognomina* was due to the fact that her father, Edward Barrett Moulton, assumed again his mother's maiden name of Barrett, on inheriting from her father a large estate in Jamaica, where the families of both his parents had been established for two or three generations. It was, however, as plain Elizabeth Barrett that the most remarkably gifted woman of the Victorian era who came 'before the swallow dares' upon the bleak Scottish border in the first decade of her century was destined to become known to the world.

The child herself had no early recollections of the north, for while she was still an infant, her father purchased the beautiful estate of Hope End in Herefordshire, among the Malvern Hills, and continued to reside there until Elizabeth was past twenty. She was the eldest of eleven children, three girls and eight boys, who came in rapid succession.

It does not appear that any other member of this numerous family showed marked literary aptitude or distinguished talent of any kind. The father had the sort of early training and associations which are implied in his having been, for a little while, at Harrow School, — which he left for the very un-English reason of not liking to be flogged, as fag, for burning his elder's toast, — and for a short time also at Cambridge, where, however, he took no degree, having left the University to be married while still an undergraduate.

Mr. Moulton Barrett was proud of the precocious talent which he soon detected in his eldest child, and 'did his best,' as she herself confessed, 'to spoil' her, by printing, at his own expense, fifty copies of her epic, in four books, on the *Battle of Marathon*, which was completed at the ripe age of thirteen! This complacent father was. by all accounts, a peculiarly despotic ruler of his own household, but his clever child was dutifully and even devotedly fond of him, and remained the most submissive of his subjects up to the memorable moment when the strong will which she had inherited from himself clashed once for all with his, and she revolted successfully from what seems to-day a simply incredible stretch of his paternal power.

There is no ground for regarding Elizabeth Barrett's poetic genius as an inheritance either from this formidable father, or from the meek and shadowy mother, who died soon after giving birth to her eighth son; and in trying to trace the genesis of her signal endowment, we find ourselves driven back upon fanciful speculations concerning the large general influx of 'intellectual day,' which appears to have visited our planet in the first years of the century now ending. More persons predestined to great eminence in their various lines were born between 1800 and 1810 than in all the next six or seven decades.

Miss Barrett was almost entirely self-educated. Naturally she did not go to school, because girls of her condition never did go to school at the era of her early maidenhood and naturally, too, we hear nothing about her governesses. What, indeed, could the regulation governess of 1815, who for twenty pounds a year taught her pupils to work samplers and make curtseys, beside Miss Austen's delightful curriculum of 'the metals, semi-metals, planets, and distinguished philosophers,' have done with a child who says of herself, at that period: 'I wrote verses, as I dare say many have done who never wrote poems, very early, — at eight years old and earlier. . . . The Greeks were my demigods, and haunted me out of Pope's Homer, until I dreamed more of Agamemnon than of Moses, the black pony.' And further on, in the same résumé of early recollections, furnished to Mr. Richard Horne when he was compiling 'A New Spirit of the Age:' 'The love of Pope's Homer threw me into Pope on the one side, and into Greek, on the other, and into Latin as a help to Greek; and the influence of all these tendencies is manifest so long after as in my *Essay on Mind*, a didactic poem written when I was seventeen or eighteen, and early repented of, as worthy of all repentance.' The ambitious maiden learned the elements of Greek from her brother Edward's tutor, Mr. MacSwiney, and she kept up that language to excellent purpose by readings with the blind scholar, Hugh Stuart Boyd, then living at Malvern, not far from Hope End. Latin she understood much less thoroughly than Greek; and how she acquired the modern European tongues, most of which she could soon read with fluency, she probably knew no better than the rest of us remember how we learned to read our own. The history of Elizabeth Barrett's mental development during the first twenty years of her life may be summed up in a very few words, — Astonishing avidity and aptitude for learning, omnivorous reading, and no regular training whatsoever.

For fifteen of these years she was an active child, roaming, riding, and dreaming at her own sweet will over the fair acres of a large estate in a singularly noble country. But at that critical age she got an injury to the spine, through attempting, in her impatience for a gallop, to saddle her pony unaided; and the long ensuing confinement to her couch developed the seeds of that organic malady which kept her a prisoner for twenty years more, and an invalid always, until she died at fifty-five.

Her love of nature and her love of books had hitherto kept healthful pace with one another. Now books became her world, and she also began, systematically, and with a quaintly conscientious assiduity, to *practice* verse-making. 'Poetry' — to quote once more from her own *Recollections* — 'became a distinct object with me; an object to read, think and live for.' Her compositions remained, for what seems an unusually long time, purely imitative, — as conventional, almost, as arpeggios and five-finger exercises to the student of the piano. The *Essay on Mind*, already mentioned, in two books comprising six hundred and thirty heroic couplets, was merely, as she herself was not slow to perceive, a presumptuous girl's quavering echo of Pope's *Essay on Man*. In 1826, when Elizabeth was twenty, Mr. Moulton Barrett found, in Paternoster Row, a publisher who was willing to bring out this curious production on condition of the fond father's defraying something more than half the expense. But neither in the essay itself, nor in the fourteen 'occasional' pieces that were printed along with it, was there any very clearly marked originality either of thought or expression. Seven years later, in 1833, the patient scholar made another diffident appeal to the public, with her frigid and otherwise faulty first translation of the *Prometheus* of Æschylus, and another score or so of lesser pieces, all of them, excepting one short and simple devotional hymn, still singularly colorless and tame. It was in the interval between this timid venture and the appearance, in 1838, of *The Seraphim and Other Poems* that Elizabeth Barrett found her true voice, in stanzas like the following from 'The Poet's Vow,' where thought and expression are at last fused in a form as integral and inevitable as that of a native crystal:—

> Hear me forswear man's sympathies,
> His pleasant yea and no,
> His riot on the piteous earth
> Whereon his thistles grow;—
> His changing love — with stars above;
> His pride — with graves below!

The author of these condensed lines had long cherished a trembling hope that she was a poet by the grace of God. She was henceforth established as such by the verdict of man.

Her very best work was yet to be done, but the broad scope of her talent had been fully manifested, as well as her genuine distinction of mind, fertility of invention, and rare moral fibre. A true child of the romantic period, she was, from first to last, an intrepid idealist. Hers was, above all things, a religious nature, and she had already passed through a deep spiritual experience. All her life long, she continued to confess the tenets and even to employ the phraseology of the rather strict school of evangelical piety in which she had been born and bred, to dislike ritual and all artificial aids to the conscience, and implicitly to believe in the direct message of God to every human soul. She became a prophet and a guide to her generation in her poetry, as Charles Dickens was in his prose romances, through her intense and unaffected humanitarianism, and her fiery advocacy of the cause of all earth's poor and neglected. Her poetical ear was far from perfect, and when once she had outgrown her imitative period, she indulged in experiments and freaks of versification which might never have been attempted if her early studies had been less purely voluntary, and if she had enjoyed the advantage, during her growing years, of the society of living purists. But as an offset to this defect in her organization, she had one supreme gift — one which has never been bestowed on any other woman in anything like the same degree: she had what the French call *la longue haleine*, the power of indefinitely sustained creation, accompanied by only too great an affluence of illustrative imagery.

We have also, happily, the private letters of Miss Barrett written to familiar friends at this period — long, discursive, unstudied letters which testify unconsciously to the perfect sweetness of her womanly character, the warmth of her filial and sisterly affection, her modesty concerning her own powers, and ever generous appreciation of those of others, her cheerful constancy in suffering, and the high courage with which she faced what appeared, for long, to be an all but certain fatality. Word and deed were remarkably consistent in her case. She had, in the fullest sense of the phrase, a beautiful soul.

In 1832 Mr. Moulton Barrett had been forced by the pressure of pecuniary embarrassments, consequent on the abolition of slavery in the British colonies, to sell Hope End and remove his family, first to Sidmouth in Devonshire, and subsequently to Wimpole Street in London. The climate of the metropolis was as bad as possible for the pulmonary trouble from which Miss Barrett suffered; and any benefit that might have been derived from a temporary removal to Torquay in 1835, was worse than nullified by the effects of a terrible shock which the invalid received in that place. Her favorite brother

Edward, the one nearest to herself in age, was drowned while boating, almost within sight of her window, and it seemed, for a time, as though she could not long survive him. But her brave spirit rose, in the end, above even this cruel bereavement; and though closely confined to her chamber after her sad return to London, and often for many days together to her bed, her mind seemed more active and lucid than ever and more productive. She became a frequent contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine* and the Athenæum newspaper, as well as to various periodicals which no longer exist: and living in the great centre of English thought, even with all the disadvantages of her fragile health, she ended by making the personal acquaintance of certain men and women of light and leading: of Miss Mitford and Mrs. Jameson; of the poet Wordsworth, who was then Laureate; of Richard Horne and Henry Chorley, and her own accomplished and even generous relative John Kenyon; and finally, of the great poet and valiant knight, who was to rescue his delicate princess from her long captivity, and add his already famous name to her own.

In 1844 appeared the two volumes of Poems which have formed the basis of all the later editions of Mrs. Browning's miscellaneous works. They were dedicated, in an eloquent preface, to her father, who had been, as she said, 'both public and critic' to her immature attempts; and beginning with the 'Drama of Exile,' they included, beside most of the pieces which had appeared in the small volume of 1838, several more of those by which she will be best and longest remembered, such as 'The Dead Pan,' 'The Vision of Poets,' 'Cowper's Grave,' and that wildly romantic ballad of contemporary manners, 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' which brought Robert Browning to her feet.

It was John Kenyon, a kinsman, as has been said, of the Barrett family, and also the son of a schoolmate of Robert Browning's father, who encouraged the brilliant young author of 'Paracelsus,' 'Sordello,' 'Pippa Passes,' the 'Cavalier Lyrics,' and 'A Blot in the 'Scutcheon,' to write to the invalid lady (six years his senior), and tell her how much he had admired 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' and other pieces in the *Poems of 1844*. Nothing could have been more unworldly and unconventional than the opening, upon either side, of this famous correspondence which, after having been kept in a small cabinet by itself for fifty years, and treasured as a most precious and sacred family possession, was given to the world in 1899. 'I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett,' . . . wrote Robert Browning in his first letter, . . . 'the fresh, strange music, the affluent language, the exquisite pathos, and true, new, brave thought; but in thus addressing myself to you, your own self and for the first time, my feeling rises altogether. I do, as I say, love these books with all my heart, and I love you too.'

This letter is dated January 10, 1845, and on the next day Miss Barrett replied:—

'I thank you, dear Mr. Browning, from the bottom of my heart. You meant to give me pleasure by your letter, and even if the object had not been answered I ought still to thank you. But it is thoroughly answered. Such a letter from such a hand! Sympathy is dear, very dear to me; but the sympathy of a poet, and of such a poet, is the quintessence of sympathy to me.' From this time until their marriage, a year and a half later, the two poets wrote to each other almost daily; becoming constantly more enamored, as they discovered ever deeper and deeper sources of intellectual and spiritual sympathy. There was naturally more of mutual admiration in the letters thus exchanged than of mutual criticism; but the admiration is of a peculiarly ingenuous and noble kind, and there are some very interesting discussions, notably one, by the two Greek enthusiasts, of the symbolism of the Prometheus, apropos of Miss Barrett's first translation;

beside many a luminous comment made, in passing, on the early efforts, especially of Robert Browning. The lady, on the other hand, whose experience had hitherto been so painfully restricted, gained greatly in her knowledge of real life and living men, by daily association with one of the most distinguished analysts of human character and motive that the world has ever seen. On May 21, 1845, he visited her for the first time, and, not long after, made his first formal offer of marriage, which was decisively though sorrowfully refused. But these two could no longer live apart; and Miss Barrett's health improved so rapidly during the summer of 1845, under the tonic of her new happiness, that when her lover's proposal was repeated for the third time, near the end of January, 1846, she yielded a conditional assent.

'Let it be this way, ever dearest,' she wrote. 'If, in the time of fine weather, I am not ill, *then, not now*, you shall decide, and your decision shall be duty and desire to me both. I will make no difficulties.'

The 'difficulties,' as the event proved, were to be made by the lady's autocratic father, who, when asked to sanction his daughter's engagement, instantly and peremptorily refused. The abundantly ripe respective ages of the suppliants for his blessing — forty and thirty-four — give this action of Mr. Moulton Barrett's a sufficiently absurd air; but it would be more respectable, or, at least, more comprehensible, could we suppose the sole motive of his opposition to have been his daughter's condition of seemingly hopeless invalidism. When, however, we find him a few years later prohibiting, with equal sternness, the marriage of his younger daughter Henrietta, whose health was admirable, with Captain Surtees Cook, we are forced to seek in some morbid idiosyncrasy of the father's own the motive for his extraordinary conduct. In the latter, as in the former and more famous case, the betrothed pair were driven to the undignified expedient of private marriage and clandestine evasion.

Although both Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett had been born and educated nonconformists, they were united by the English marriage service, in the parish church of Saint Marylebone, London. Ever after they had resolved to dispense with Mr. Moulton Barrett's consent, the lady had been trying her slender strength by short walks about the northern squares, — Cavendish, Manchester, Portman, — in the neighborhood of her home. She went accompanied by her faithful maid Wilson, and her equally faithful dog Flush, the gift of Miss Mitford, and the subject of a well-known poem. On the memorable day of the marriage, she went out, ostensibly for her constitutional, and returned as usual, passed one week more under her father's roof, then left it with the same escort as before, was joined by Robert Browning at the railway station, and the wedded pair left quietly for France that night, by the Southampton packet. Change of climate confirmed the late improvement in the health of the bride, and she who had stood face to face with death so long, had fifteen more years granted her, of a comparatively active and varied, and always busy life.

Those years were passed, for the most part, in Italy, in the permanent home which the married pair presently made for themselves at Casa Guidi on the Piazza Pitti, then the Piazza del Gran Duca in Florence. Their apartment was on the *piano nobile* of the palace — the floor which had formerly been occupied by the proprietor. It was furnished largely out of the antiquity-shops of Florence; a far happier hunting-ground then than now, when the remotest nooks of Tuscany have been thoroughly explored for '*roba vecch'*,' — and the general aspect of the Browning interior became, in the course of a few years, exceedingly curious and picturesque. On the outer wall of Casa Guidi may be seen to-day the memorial tablet which the affectionate Italians asked the privilege of inserting there after Mrs. Browning's death. It bears the following inscription:[1] —

QUI SCRISSE E MORI
ELIZABETTA BARRETT BROWNING
CHE IN CUORE DI DONNA CONCILIAVA
SCIENZA DI DOTTO E SPIRITO DI POETA
E FECE DEL SUO VERSO AUREO ANELLO
FRA ITALIA E INGHILTERRA
PONE QUESTA LAPIDE
FIRENZE GRATA
1861

During the dubious period of her courtship and betrothal, Miss Barrett had written and inscribed to her lover those sonnets entitled 'From the Portuguese,' which would have given her a place among the first of England's minstrels, if she had never written anything else. In the years immediately succeeding her marriage, her dawning sympathy with the cause of Italian independence, which later she was to embrace with so consuming a passion, found voice in the two-part poem entitled *Casa Guidi Windows*, published in England in 1851. The only child of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning, was born in Florence on the 9th of March, 1849, and Mrs. Browning immediately revealed herself as the most natural, tender, absorbed, and admiring of mothers. A new edition of her collected poems, which appeared in 1850, contained a complete re-translation of the Prometheus, beside the beautiful Portuguese sonnets, and several others not included in the edition of 1844. The summer of 1851 was passed by the Brownings in England, and the winter of 1851–52 in Paris. They were thus present in the French capital at the time of Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*, and, incredible as it seems at this distance of time, and inconsistent with the wonted tenor of her opinions and sympathies, Mrs. Browning at least warmly applauded that act of high-handed usurpation. The Emperor Napoleon III., for such in the course of a few months he became, was always a hero to the enthusiastic Englishwoman, and to him she came confidently to look, in later days, as the only possible savior of her beloved Italy. The winter of 1855–56 was again passed in Paris; and in London, during the following autumn, Mrs. Browning finished, in the house of her cousin and friend, John Kenyon, and dedicated to him only a few weeks before his death, her most considerable work, *Aurora Leigh*, a modern society novel in blank verse, with a distinctly socialistic purpose.

But the strength stored up in the more genial climate of Italy always ebbed with alarming rapidity during Mrs. Browning's visits to England, and these were yet further embittered to her loving heart by the stubborn hostility of her father, who could never be induced to forgive the disobedient marriage, and actually left his daughter's name out of his last will and testament, when he died, in 1859.

During the last five years of her life Mrs. Browning did not leave Italy. The time was passed between Florence and Rome, with long summer sojourns in the fine old hill-city of Siena. She was all this while becoming more deeply absorbed in the gallant struggle of the Italian nation for independence, which had entered a new phase in 1855, when the participation of Piedmont in the Crimean war was resolved and effected; and she, in common with almost all good Italian patriots, built high hopes on the alliance with France, and on Louis Napoleon's intervention when hostilities were declared against Austria by Victor Emanuel in 1859. The heart-sickening disappointment of these hopes, just as victory and emancipation seemed in sight, by the summary conclusion of the Peace of Villafranca, found sharp, not to say fierce and distempered utterance in the *Poems before Congress*, which appeared in the spring of 1860, and were the last of Mrs. Browning's works to be published in her lifetime.

---

[1] Here wrote and died Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who united to a woman's heart the learning of a savant and the inspiration of a poet, and made her verse a golden link between Italy and England. This tablet was set by grateful Florence in 1861.

The author of the inscription was the poet Tommaseo.

There is another subject also on which it will seem to many that the originally fine judgment of Mrs. Browning was strangely clouded in her latter days, and the balance of her faculties disturbed. She became engrossingly interested in the so-called 'spiritual manifestations' which were rife between 1850 and 1860, and was very credulous concerning them. Her strong native bias toward mysticism, which is very apparent in the more deeply religious of her early poems, had found but slight support in the form of Protestant faith which she inherited and accepted; and the idea of free and authorized intercourse between living beings and departed souls laid strong hold of her imagination, and was welcomed as promising to fill a great void in her spiritual life. She was making few new acquaintances at this period, but a stranger who came recommended as a 'powerful medium,' could rely upon a welcome, and the most palpable charlatanry in the way of spiritual communications and manifestations could win her grave attention and completely mystify her subtle mind. Robert Browning was far from sharing his wife's views upon this matter, but he revered her too deeply to differ from her before the world, and it may safely be said that neither this nor any other speculative difference ever did make or could have made a serious division between them. From 1859 to 1861, moreover, the question of the fate of Italy seems almost wholly to have displaced the cause of the too voluble 'spirits' in the eager mind of the poetess. A score or more of short pieces written in her last year, together with a few belonging to a much earlier period which had been withheld for private reasons, were collected by Robert Browning and given to the world under the title of *Last Poems* during the winter following his wife's death.

Although Mrs. Browning's health had seemed so wonderfully restored in the early part of her wedded life, the organic trouble was always there, and she was at no time strong enough to go into general society. But the married pair had gathered about them in their Florentine and Roman homes a small circle of congenial friends, mostly English and Americans, residing like themselves in Italy. The number of our own countrymen and women admitted into this favored group seems large in proportion to the whole, including as it does such names as Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Hosmer, Kate Field, Hiram Powers, the sculptor, and his family in Florence; William Story, the all-accomplished, and his family in Rome. The most intimate of Mrs. Browning's English friends and neighbors in Florence was Miss Isa Blagden, a lady of fortune and distinction, to whom some of the most interesting letters of both poets are addressed, and who lived in the Villa Briochion[1] upon Bellosguardo, where was laid the highly wrought last scene of *Aurora Leigh;* and it so happened that this lady was the only member of their innermost circle who had lingered in Florence until the hot June of 1861, when the Brownings returned from passing their winter in Rome.

---

[1] The American lady to whom Miss Blagden told the story, to follow, of Mrs. Browning's last night on earth, assures me that the villa on Bellosguardo, which that lady rented and adorned, was habitually known in Florence both before and after her occupancy, as the *Villa Bricchieri*. This seems a much more probable name for an Italian villa than *Briochion;* but I adopt the form used by both ladies in their letters, and can only suggest that it may have been some private jest or little pedantic freak of theirs which led them to give the name a quasi-Greek form.

Mrs. Browning had never completely rallied from the severe illness which followed the shocks and agitations of 1859 ; and now, both to her husband and her friend, she seemed so unnaturally debilitated, that an attack of bronchitis quite similar, apparently, to many she had had before, occasioned them an alarm which they could not conceal. With her own indomitable spirit, the patient herself made light of her case, and of what she called the exaggerated precautions of her two devoted nurses; and after a few days of acute suffering, she did indeed seem to have passed the crisis of her disorder, and to be doing well; so that Miss Blagden, who had been for some days at Casa Guidi, went back, at the earnest entreaty of both her friends, to her villa on the hilltop, for a night's much needed rest. It was to a young American lady lately come as a bride to Florence, Mrs. J. A. Jackson, that she told, not long after, the rather singular story of her own experience on the night of June 29.

By the time Miss Blagden reached home every sensation of fatigue had vanished; her faculties were all curiously alert, and, unable even to think of sleeping, she sat down at her desk under a pretence of writing letters. But the current of her thoughts refused to turn. She sat with pen suspended, unconscious of the passage of time, thinking only of the solitary pair in the shadowy valley beneath her (*in media umbrâ mortis*), cut off by their very greatness from the close touch of common humanity, but so marvellously bound up in one another, from whom the dread stroke of uttermost calamity, so often threatened, had seemingly been turned aside once more. So the brief hours of the midsummer night went by until dawn began to whiten behind the matchless horizon of Fiesole, and the trees to rustle in all the surrounding gardens, when, stepping out upon her balcony for a breath of dewy air, the watcher caught, far down in the sleeping city, still at that time surrounded by its beautiful old walls, the rattle of a single pair of wheels between high houses over a stony pavement.

With an instantaneous conviction that the cab was coming for her, and that she was needed once more at Casa Guidi, Miss Blagden waited only to hear the vehicle pass the Porta Romana, and begin the steep and devious ascent to Bellosguardo; and long before it stopped at her own gate, as she had so surely known it would, she was dressed to go back, and awaiting it there. But the message which the cabman brought her was, '*La signora della Casa Guidi e morta.*'

H. W. P.

THE SERAPHIM AND OTHER POEMS

In 1833, Miss Barrett's first translation of the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus was published in London, — along with a score or so of miscellaneous pieces, but without her name, — by A. J. Valpy, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street. The little volume fell dead from the press — receiving only a few lines of scathing criticism in the *Athenæum*. The translator herself confessed a decade later that her version of the great Greek drama had been made in twelve days and 'should have been thrown into the fire afterward ; — the only means of giving it a little warmth.' She did her best, in fact, to suppress the volume, and subsequently executed an entire new translation of the Prometheus, which was included in the edition of her poems that appeared in 1850, and has ever since kept its place in the standard editions of her works. Meanwhile her studies in Æschylus had suggested to the young poetess the subject of the Seraphim — the first original work of hers destined to obtain anything like general recognition. 'I thought,' she says, in her own preface to *The Seraphim and other Poems* (London, Saunders J. Otley, Conduit Street, 1838), 'that, had Æschylus lived after the incarnation and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, he might have turned, if not in moral and intellectual, yet in poetic faith, from the solitudes of Caucasus to the deeper desertness of that crowded Jerusalem where none had any pity . . . to the rent rocks and darkened sun . . . to the victim whose sustaining thought beneath an unexampled agony, was not the Titanic, "I can revenge," but the celestial "I can forgive." '

THE SERAPHIM

Σῷ δὲ θρόνῳ πυροέντι παρεστᾶσιν πολύμοχθοι Ἄγγελοι. — *Orpheus.*

'I look for Angels' songs, and hear Him cry.'
— *Giles Fletcher.*

PART THE FIRST

[*It is the time of the Crucifixion ; and the Angels of Heaven have departed towards the Earth, except the two Seraphim,* Ador the Strong *and* Zerah the Bright One.
The place is the outer side of the shut Heavenly Gate.]

Ador. O Seraph, pause no more !
Beside this gate of heaven we stand alone.
Zerah. Of heaven !
Ador. Our brother hosts are gone —
Zerah. Are gone before.
Ador. And the golden harps the angels bore
To help the songs of their desire,
Still burning from their hands of fire,
Lie without touch or tone
Upon the glass-sea shore.
Zerah. Silent upon the glass-sea shore !
Ador. There the Shadow from the throne
Formless with infinity
Hovers o'er the crystal sea
Awfuller than light derived,
And red with those primæval heats
Whereby all life has lived.
Zerah. Our visible God, our heavenly seats !
Ador. Beneath us sinks the pomp angelical,
Cherub and seraph, powers and virtues, all, —
The roar of whose descent has died
To a still sound, as thunder into rain.
Immeasurable space spreads magnified
With that thick life, along the plane
The worlds slid out on. What a fall
And eddy of wings innumerous, crossed
By trailing curls that have not lost
The glitter of the God-smile shed
On every prostrate angel's head !
What gleaming up of hands that fling
Their homage in retorted rays,
From high instinct of worshipping,
And habitude of praise !

Zerah. Rapidly they drop below us:
Pointed palm and wing and hair
Indistinguishable show us
Only pulses in the air
Throbbing with a fiery beat,
As if a new creation heard
Some divine and plastic word,
And trembling at its new-found being,
Awakened at our feet.
Ador. Zerah, do not wait for seeing!
His voice, his, that thrills us so
As we our harpstrings, uttered *Go,*
Behold the Holy in his woe!
And all are gone, save thee and —
Zerah. Thee!
Ador. I stood the nearest to the throne
In hierarchical degree,
What time the Voice said *Go!*
And whether I was moved alone
By the storm-pathos of the tone
Which swept through heaven the alien name of *woe,*
Or whether the subtle glory broke
Through my strong and shielding wings,
Bearing to my finite essence
Incapacious of their presence,
Infinite imaginings
None knoweth save the Throned who spoke;
But I who at creation stood upright
And heard the God-breath move
Shaping the words that lightened, 'Be there light,'
Nor trembled but with love,
Now fell down shudderingly,
My face upon the pavement whence I had towered,
As if in mine immortal overpowered
By God's eternity.
Zerah. Let me wait! — let me wait! —
Ador. Nay, gaze not backward through the gate!
God fills our heaven with God's own solitude
Till all the pavements glow:
His Godhead being no more subdued,
By itself, to glories low
Which seraphs can sustain.
What if thou, in gazing so,
Shouldst behold but only one
Attribute, the veil undone —
Even that to which we dare to press
Nearest, for its gentleness —
Ay, his love!
How the deep ecstatic pain
Thy being's strength would capture!
Without language for the rapture,
Without music strong to come
And set the adoration free,
For ever, ever, wouldst thou be
Amid the general chorus dumb,
God-stricken to seraphic agony.
Or, brother, what if on thine eyes
In vision bare should rise
The life-fount whence his hand did gather
With solitary force
Our immortalities!
Straightway how thine own would wither,
Falter like a human breath,
And shrink into a point like death,
By gazing on its source! —
My words have imaged dread.
Meekly hast thou bent thine head,
And dropt thy wings in languishment:
Overclouding foot and face,
As if God's throne were eminent
Before thee, in the place.
Yet not — not so,
O loving spirit and meek, dost thou fulfil
The supreme Will.
Not for obeisance but obedience,
Give motion to thy wings! Depart from hence!
The voice said 'Go!'
Zerah. Belovèd, I depart,
His will is as a spirit within my spirit,
A portion of the being I inherit.
His will is mine obedience. I resemble
A flame all undefilèd though it tremble;
I go and tremble. Love me, O beloved!
O thou, who stronger art,
And standest ever near the Infinite,
Pale with the light of Light,
Love me, belovèd! me, more newly made,
More feeble, more afraid;
And let me hear with mine thy pinions moved,
As close and gentle as the loving are,
That love being near, heaven may not seem so far.
Ador. I am near thee and I love thee.
Were I loveless, from thee gone,
Love is round, beneath, above thee,
God, the omnipresent one.
Spread the wing and lift the brow
Well-beloved, what fearest thou?
Zerah. I fear, I fear —
Ador. What fear?

Zerah. The fear of earth.
Ador. Of earth, the God-created and God-praised
In the hour of birth?
Where every night the moon in light
Doth lead the waters silver-faced?
Where every day the sun doth lay
A rapture to the heart of all
The leafy and reeded pastoral,
As if the joyous shout which burst
From angel lips to see him first,
Had left a silent echo in his ray?
Zerah. Of earth — the God-created and God-curst,
Where man is, and the thorn
Where sun and moon have borne
No light to souls forlorn:
Where Eden's tree of life no more uprears
Its spiral leaves and fruitage, but instead
The yew-tree bows its melancholy head
And all the undergrasses kills and seres.
Ador. Of earth the weak,
Made and unmade?
Where men, that faint, do strive for crowns that fade?
Where, having won the profit which they seek,
They lie beside the sceptre and the gold
With fleshless hands that cannot wield or hold,
And the stars shine in their unwinking eyes?
Zerah. Of earth the bold,
Where the blind matter wrings
An awful potence out of impotence,
Bowing the spiritual things
To the things of sense.
Where the human will replies
With ay and no,
Because the human pulse is quick or slow.
Where Love succumbs to Change,
With only his own memories, for revenge.
And the fearful mystery —
Ador. Called Death?
Zerah. Nay, death is fearful, — but who saith
'To die,' is comprehensible.
What's fearfuller, thou knowest well,
Though the utterance be not for thee,
Lest it blanch thy lips from glory —
Ay! the cursèd thing that moved
A shadow of ill, long time ago,
Across our heaven's own shining floor,
And when it vanished, some who were
On thrones of holy empire there,
Did reign — were seen — were — never more.
Come nearer, O beloved!
Ador. I am near thee. Didst thou bear thee
Ever to this earth?
Zerah. Before.
When thrilling from his hand along
Its lustrous path with spheric song
The earth was deathless, sorrowless.
Unfearing, then, pure feet might press
The grasses brightening with their feet,
For God's own voice did mix its sound
In a solemn confluence oft
With the rivers' flowing round,
And the life-tree's waving soft.
Beautiful new earth and strange!
Ador. Hast thou seen it since — the change?
Zerah. Nay, or wherefore should I fear
To look upon it now?
I have beheld the ruined things
Only in depicturings
Of angels from an earthly mission, —
Strong one, even upon thy brow,
When, with task completed, given
Back to us in that transition,
I have beheld thee silent stand,
Abstracted in the seraph band,
Without a smile in heaven.
Ador. Then thou wast not one of those
Whom the loving Father chose
In visionary pomp to sweep
O'er Judæa's grassy places,
O'er the shepherds and the sheep,
Though thou art so tender? — dimming
All the stars except one star
With their brighter kinder faces,
And using heaven's own tune in hymning,
While deep response from earth's own mountains ran,
'Peace upon earth, goodwill to man.'
Zerah. 'Glory to God.' I said amen afar.
And those who from that earthly mission are,
Within mine ears have told
That the seven everlasting Spirits did hold
With such a sweet and prodigal constraint
The meaning yet the mystery of the song
What time they sang it, on their natures strong,

That, gazing down on earth's dark steadfastness
And speaking the new peace in promises,
The love and pity made their voices faint
Into the low and tender music, keeping
The place in heaven of what on earth is weeping.
Ador. 'Peace upon earth.' Come down to it.
Zerah. Ah me!
I hear thereof uncomprehendingly.
Peace where the tempest, where the sighing is,
And worship of the idol, 'stead of his?
Ador. Yea, peace, where He is.
Zerah. He!
Say it again.
Ador. Where He is.
Zerah. Can it be
That earth retains a tree
Whose leaves, like Eden foliage, can be swayed
By the breathing of his voice, nor shrink and fade?
Ador. There is a tree! — it hath no leaf nor root;
Upon it hangs a curse for all its fruit:
Its shadow on his head is laid.
For he, the crownèd Son,
Has left his crown and throne,
Walks earth in Adam's clay,
Eve's snake to bruise and slay —
Zerah. Walks earth in clay?
Ador. And walking in the clay which he created,
He through it shall touch death.
What do I utter? what conceive? did breath
Of demon howl it in a blasphemy?
Or was it mine own voice, informed, dilated
By the seven confluent Spirits? — Speak — answer me!
Who said man's victim was his deity?
Zerah. Beloved, beloved, the word came forth from thee.
Thine eyes are rolling a tempestuous light
Above, below, around,
As putting thunder-questions without cloud,
Reverberate without sound,
To universal nature's depth and height.
The tremor of an inexpressive thought
Too self-amazed to shape itself aloud,
O'erruns the awful curving of thy lips;
And while thine hands are stretched above,
As newly they had caught
Some lightning from the Throne, or showed the Lord
Some retributive sword,
Thy brows do alternate with wild eclipse
And radiance, with contrasted wrath and love,
As God had called thee to a seraph's part,
With a man's quailing heart.
Ador. O heart — O heart of man!
O ta'en from human clay
To be no seraph's but Jehovah's own!
Made holy in the taking,
And yet unseparate
From death's perpetual ban,
And human feelings sad and passionate:
Still subject to the treacherous forsaking
Of other hearts, and its own steadfast pain.
O heart of man — of God! which God has ta'en
From out the dust, with its humanity
Mournful and weak yet innocent around it,
And bade its many pulses beating lie
Beside that incommunicable stir
Of Deity wherewith He interwound it.
O man! and is thy nature so defiled
That all that holy Heart's devout law-keeping,
And low pathetic beat in deserts wild,
And gushings pitiful of tender weeping
For traitors who consigned it to such woe —
That all could cleanse thee not, without the flow
Of blood, the life-blood — *his* — and streaming *so?*
O earth the thundercleft, windshaken, where
The louder voice of 'blood and blood' doth rise,
Hast thou an altar for this sacrifice?
O heaven! O vacant throne!
O crownèd hierarchies that wear your crown
When his is put away!
Are ye unshamèd that ye cannot dim
Your alien brightness to be liker him,
Assume a human passion, and down-lay
Your sweet secureness for congenial fears,
And teach your cloudless ever-burning eyes
The mystery of his tears?
Zerah. I am strong, I am strong.
Were I never to see my heaven again,

I would wheel to earth like the tempest rain
Which sweeps there with an exultant sound
To lose its life as it reaches the ground.
I am strong, I am strong.
Away from mine inward vision swim
The shining seats of my heavenly birth,
I see but his, I see but Him —
The Maker's steps on his cruel earth.
Will the bitter herbs of earth grow sweet
To me, as trodden by his feet?
Will the vexed, accurst humanity,
As worn by Him, begin to be
A blessèd, yea, a sacred thing
For love and awe and ministering?
I am strong, I am strong.
By our angel ken shall we survey
His loving smile through his woeful clay?
I am swift, I am strong,
The love is bearing me along.
Ador. One love is bearing us along.

PART THE SECOND

Mid-air, above Judæa. Ador *and* Zerah *are a little apart from the visible* Angelic Hosts.

Ador. Belovèd! dost thou see? —
Zerah. Thee, — thee.
Thy burning eyes already are
Grown wild and mournful as a star
Whose occupation is for aye
To look upon the place of clay
Whereon thou lookest now.
The crown is fainting on thy brow
To the likeness of a cloud,
The forehead's self a little bowed
From its aspect high and holy,
As it would in meekness meet
Some seraphic melancholy:
Thy very wings that lately flung
An outline clear, do flicker here
And wear to each a shadow hung,
Dropped across thy feet.
In these strange contrasting glooms
Stagnant with the scent of tombs,
Seraph faces, O my brother,
Show awfully to one another.
Ador. Dost thou see?
Zerah. Even so; I see
Our empyreal company,
Alone the memory of their brightness
Left in them, as in thee.
The circle upon circle, tier on tier,
Piling earth's hemisphere
With heavenly infiniteness,
Above us and around,
Straining the whole horizon like a bow:
Their songful lips divorcèd from all sound,
A darkness gliding down their silvery glances, —
Bowing their steadfast solemn countenances
As if they heard God speak, and could not glow.
Ador. Look downward! dost thou see?
Zerah. And wouldst thou press *that* vision on my words?
Doth not earth speak enough
Of change and of undoing,
Without a seraph's witness? Oceans rough
With tempest, pastoral swards
Displaced by fiery deserts, mountains ruing
The bolt fallen yesterday,
That shake their piny heads, as who would say
'We are too beautiful for our decay' —
Shall seraphs speak of these things? Let alone
Earth to her earthly moan!
Voice of all things. Is there no moan but hers?
Ador. Hearest thou the attestation
Of the rousèd universe
Like a desert-lion shaking
Dews of silence from its mane?
With an irrepressive passion
Uprising at once,
Rising up and forsaking
Its solemn state in the circle of suns,
To attest the pain
Of him who stands (O patience sweet!)
In his own hand-prints of creation,
With human feet?
Voice of all things. Is there no moan but ours?
Zerah. Forms, Spaces, Motions wide,
O meek, insensate things,
O congregated matters! who inherit,
Instead of vital powers,
Impulsions God-supplied;
Instead of influent spirit,
A clear informing beauty;
Instead of creature-duty,
Submission calm as rest.
Lights, without feet or wings,
In golden courses sliding!

Glooms, stagnantly subsiding,
Whose lustrous heart away was prest
Into the argent stars !
Ye crystal firmamental bars
That hold the skyey waters free
From tide or tempest's ecstasy !
Airs universal ! thunders lorn
That wait your lightnings in cloud-cave
Hewn out by the winds ! O brave
And subtle elements ! the Holy
Hath charged me by your voice with folly.[1]
Enough, the mystic arrow leaves its wound.
Return ye to your silences inborn,
Or to your inarticulated sound !
Ador. Zerah !
Zerah. Wilt *thou* rebuke ?
God hath rebuked me, brother. I am weak.
Ador. Zerah, my brother Zerah ! could I speak
Of thee, 't would be of love to thee.
Zerah. Thy look
Is fixed on earth, as mine upon thy face.
Where shall I seek his ?
I have thrown
One look upon earth, but one,
Over the blue mountain-lines,
Over the forests of palms and pines,
Over the harvest-lands golden,
Over the valleys that fold in
The gardens and vines —
He is not there.
All these are unworthy
Those footsteps to bear,
Before which, bowing down
I would fain quench the stars of my crown
In the dark of the earthy.
Where shall I seek Him ?
No reply ?
Hath language left thy lips, to place
Its vocal in thine eye ?
Ador, Ador ! are we come
To a double portent, that
Dumb matter grows articulate
And songful seraphs dumb ?
Ador, Ador !
Ador. I constrain
The passion of my silence. None
Of those places gazed upon
Are gloomy enow to fit his pain.
Unto Him, whose forming word
Gave to Nature flower and sward,
She hath given back again,
For the myrtle — the thorn,
For the sylvan calm — the human scorn.
Still, still, reluctant seraph, gaze beneath !
There is a city —
Zerah. Temple and tower,
Palace and purple would droop like a flower,
(Or a cloud at our breath)
If He neared in his state
The outermost gate.
Ador. Ah me, not so
In the state of a king did the victim go !
And Thou who hangest mute of speech
'Twixt heaven and earth, with forehead yet
Stainèd by the bloody sweat,
God ! man ! Thou hast forgone thy throne in each.
Zerah. Thine eyes behold Him ?
Ador. Yea, below.
Track the gazing of mine eyes,
Naming God within thine heart
That its weakness may depart
And the vision rise !
Seest thou yet, beloved ?
Zerah. I see
Beyond the city, crosses three
And mortals three that hang thereon
'Ghast and silent to the sun.
Round them blacken and welter and press
Staring multitudes whose father
Adam was, whose brows are dark
With his Cain's corroded mark, —
Who curse with looks. Nay — let me rather
Turn unto the wilderness !
Ador. Turn not ! God dwells with men.
Zerah. Above
He dwells with angels, and they love.
Can these love ? With the living's pride
They stare at those who die, who hang
In their sight and die. They bear the streak
Of the crosses' shadow, black not wide,
To fall on their heads, as it swerves aside
When the victims' pang
Makes the dry wood creak.
Ador. The cross — the cross !
Zerah. A woman kneels
The mid cross under,
With white lips asunder,
And motion on each.
They throb, as she feels,

---

[1] 'His angels he charged with folly.' — *Job* iv. 18.

With a spasm, not a speech;
And her lids, close as sleep,
Are less calm, for the eyes
Have made room there to weep
Drop on drop —
Ador. Weep ? Weep blood,
All women, all men !
He sweated it, He,
For your pale womanhood
And base manhood. Agree
That these water-tears, then,
Are vain, mocking like laughter:
Weep blood ! Shall the flood
Of salt curses, whose foam is the darkness, on roll
Forward, on from the strand of the storm-beaten years,
And back from the rocks of the horrid hereafter,
And up, in a coil, from the present's wrath-spring,
Yea, down from the windows of heaven opening,
Deep calling to deep as they meet on his soul —
And men weep only tears ?
Zerah. Little drops in the lapse !
And yet, Ador, perhaps
It is all that they can.
Tears ! the lovingest man
Has no better bestowed
Upon man.
Ador. Nor on God.
Zerah. Do all-givers need gifts ?
If the Giver said 'Give,' the first motion would slay
Our Immortals, the echo would ruin away
The same worlds which he made. Why, what angel uplifts
Such a music, so clear,
It may seem in God's ear
Worth more than a woman's hoarse weeping ? And thus,
Pity tender as tears, I above thee would speak,
Thou woman that weepest ! weep unscorned of us !
I, the tearless and pure, am but loving and weak.
Ador. Speak low, my brother, low, — and not of love
Or human or angelic ! Rather stand
Before the throne of that Supreme above,
In whose infinitude the secrecies
Of thine own being lie hid, and lift thine hand
Exultant, saying, 'Lord God, I am wise !'
Than utter *here*, 'I love.'
Zerah. And yet thine eyes
Do utter it. They melt in tender light,
The tears of heaven.
Ador. Of heaven. Ah me !
Zerah. Ador !
Ador. Say on !
Zerah. The crucified are three.
Beloved, they are unlike.
Ador. Unlike.
Zerah. For one
Is as a man who has sinned and still
Doth wear the wicked will,
The hard malign life-energy,
Tossed outward, in the parting soul's disdain,
On brow and lip that cannot change again.
Ador. And one —
Zerah. Has also sinned.
And yet (O marvel !) doth the Spirit-wind
Blow white those waters ? Death upon his face
Is rather shine than shade,
A tender shine by looks belovèd made:
He seemeth dying in a quiet place,
And less by iron wounds in hands and feet
Than heart-broke by new joy too sudden and sweet.
Ador. And ONE ! —
Zerah. And ONE ! —
Ador. Why dost thou pause ?
Zerah. God ! God !
Spirit of my spirit ! who movest
Through seraph veins in burning deity
To light the quenchless pulses ! —
Ador. But hast trod
The depths of love in thy peculiar nature,
And not in any thou hast made and lovest
In narrow seraph hearts ! —
Zerah. Above, Creator !
Within, Upholder !
Ador. And below, below,
The creature's and the upholden's sacrifice !
Zerah. Why do I pause ? —
Ador. There is a silentness
That answers thee enow,
That, like a brazen sound
Excluding others, doth ensheathe us round; —
Hear it. It is not from the visible skies

Though they are still,
Unconscious that their own dropped dews express
The light of heaven on every earthly hill.
It is not from the hills, though calm and bare
They, since their first creation,
Through midnight cloud or morning's glittering air
Or the deep deluge blindness, toward the place
Whence thrilled the mystic word's creative grace,
And whence again shall come
The word that uncreates,
Have lift their brows in voiceless expectation.
It is not from the places that entomb
Man's dead, though common Silence there dilates
Her soul to grand proportions, worthily
To fill life's vacant room.
Not there: not there.
Not yet within those chambers lieth He,
A dead one in his living world; his south
And west winds blowing over earth and sea,
And not a breath on that creating mouth.
But now, — a silence keeps
(Not death's, nor sleep's)
The lips whose whispered word
Might roll the thunders round reverberated.
Silent art thou, O my Lord,
Bowing down thy stricken head!
Fearest thou, a groan of thine
Would make the pulse of thy creation fail
As thine own pulse? — would rend the veil
Of visible things and let the flood
Of the unseen Light, the essential God,
Rush in to whelm the undivine?
Thy silence, to my thinking, is as dread.
Zerah. O silence!
Ador. Doth it say to thee — the NAME,
Slow-learning seraph?
Zerah. I have learnt.
Ador. The flame
Perishes in thine eyes.
Zerah. He opened his,
And looked. I cannot bear —
Ador. Their agony?
Zerah. Their love. God's depth is in them. From his brows
White, terrible in meekness, didst thou see
The lifted eyes unclose?
He is God, seraph! Look no more on me,
O God — I am not God.
Ador. The loving is
Sublimed within them by the sorrowful.
In heaven we could sustain them.
Zerah. Heaven is dull,
Mine Ador, to man's earth. The light that burns
In fluent, refluent motion
Along the crystal ocean;
The springing of the golden harps between
The bowery wings, in fountains of sweet sound,
The winding, wandering music that returns
Upon itself, exultingly self-bound
In the great spheric round
Of everlasting praises;
The God-thoughts in our midst that intervene,
Visibly flashing from the súpreme throne
Full in seraphic faces
Till each astonishes the other, grown
More beautiful with worship and delight —
My heaven! my home of heaven! my infinite
Heaven-choirs! what are ye to this dust and death,
This cloud, this cold, these tears, this failing breath,
Where God's immortal love now issueth
In this MAN's woe?
Ador. His eyes are very deep yet calm.
Zerah. No more
On *me*, Jehovah-man —
Ador. Calm-deep. They show
A passion which is tranquil. They are seeing
No earth, no heaven, no men that slay and curse,
No seraphs that adore;
Their gaze is on the invisible, the dread,
The things we cannot view or think or speak,
Because we are too happy, or too weak, —
The sea of ill, for which the universe,
With all its pilèd space, can find no shore,
With all its life, no living foot to tread.
But he, accomplished in Jehovah-being,
Sustains the gaze adown,
Conceives the vast despair,

And feels the billowy griefs come up to drown,
Nor fears, nor faints, nor fails, till all be finished.
Zerah. Thus, do I find thee thus? My undiminished
And undiminishable God! — my God!
The echoes are still tremulous along
The heavenly mountains, of the latest song
Thy manifested glory swept abroad
In rushing past our lips: they echo aye
'Creator, thou art strong!
Creator, thou art blessèd over all.'
By what new utterance shall I now recall,
Unteaching the heaven-echoes? Dare I say,
'Creator, thou art feebler than thy work!
Creator, thou art sadder than thy creature!
A worm, and not a man,
Yea, no worm, but a curse?'
I dare not so mine heavenly phrase reverse.
Albeit the piercing thorn and thistle-fork
(Whose seed disordered ran
From Eve's hand trembling when the curse did reach her)
Be garnered darklier in thy soul, the rod
That smites thee never blossoming, and thou
Grief-bearer for thy world, with unkinged brow —
I leave to men their song of Ichabod:
I have an angel-tongue — I know but praise.
Ador. Hereafter shall the blood-bought captives raise
The passion-song of blood.
Zerah. And *we*, extend
Our holy vacant hands towards the Throne,
Crying 'We have no music.'
Ador. Rather, blend
Both musics into one.
The sanctities and sanctified above
Shall each to each, with lifted looks serene,
Their shining faces lean,
And mix the adoring breath
And breathe the full thanksgiving.
Zerah. But the love —
The love, mine Ador!
Ador. Do we love not?
Zerah. Yea,
But not as man shall! not with life for death,
New-throbbing through the startled being; not
With strange astonished smiles, that ever may
Gush passionate like tears and fill their place:
Nor yet with speechless memories of what
Earth's winters were, enverduring the green
Of every heavenly palm
Whose windless, shadeless calm
Moves only at the breath of the Unseen.
Oh, not with this blood on us — and this face, —
Still, haply, pale with sorrow that it bore
In our behalf, and tender evermore
With nature all our own, upon us gazing —
Nor yet with these forgiving hands upraising
Their unreproachful wounds, alone to bless!
Alas, Creator! shall we love thee less
Than mortals shall?
Ador. Amen! so let it be.
We love in our proportion, to the bound
Thine infinite our finite set around,
And that is finitely, — thou, infinite
And worthy infinite love! And our delight
Is, watching the dear love poured out to thee
From ever fuller chalice. Blessèd they,
Who love thee more than we do: blessèd we,
Viewing that love which shall exceed even this,
And winning in the sight a double bliss
For all so lost in love's supremacy.
The bliss is better. Only on the sad
Cold earth there are who say
It seemeth better to be great than glad.
The bliss is better. Love him more, O man,
Than sinless seraphs can!
Zerah. Yea, love him more!
Voices of the Angelic Multitude. Yea, more!
Ador. The loving word
Is caught by those from whom we stand apart.
For silence hath no deepness in her heart
Where love's low name low breathed would not be heard
By angels, clear as thunder.

Angelic Voices. Love him more!
Ador. Sweet voices, swooning o'er
The music which ye make!
Albeit to love there were not ever given
A mournful sound when uttered out of heaven,
That angel-sadness ye would fitly take.
Of love be silent now! we gaze adown
Upon the incarnate Love who wears no crown.
Zerah. No crown! the woe instead
Is heavy on his head,
Pressing inward on his brain
With a hot and clinging pain
Till all tears are prest away,
And clear and calm his vision may
Peruse the black abyss.
No rod, no sceptre is
Holden in his fingers pale;
They close instead upon the nail,
Concealing the sharp dole,
Never stirring to put by
The fair hair peaked with blood,
Drooping forward from the rood
Helplessly, heavily
On the cheek that waxeth colder,
Whiter ever, and the shoulder
Where the government was laid.
His glory made the heavens afraid;
Will he not unearth this cross from its hole?
His pity makes his piteous state;
Will he be uncompassionate
Alone to his proper soul?
Yea, will he not lift up
His lips from the bitter cup,
His brows from the dreary weight,
His hand from the clenching cross,
Crying, 'My Father, give to me
Again the joy I had with thee
Or ere this earth was made for loss?'
No stir: no sound.
The love and woe being interwound
He cleaveth to the woe;
And putteth forth heaven's strength below,
To bear.
Ador. And that creates his anguish now,
Which made his glory there.
Zerah. Shall it need be so?
Awake, thou Earth! behold.
Thou, uttered forth of old
In all thy life-emotion,
In all thy vernal noises,
In the rollings of thine ocean,
Leaping founts, and rivers running, —
In thy woods' prophetic heaving
Ere the rains a stroke have given,
In thy winds' exultant voices
When they feel the hills anear, —
In the firmamental sunning,
And the tempest which rejoices
Thy full heart with an awful cheer.
Thou, uttered forth of old
And with all thy music rolled
In a breath abroad
By the breathing God, —
Awake! he is here! behold!
Even *thou* —
Beseems it good
To thy vacant vision dim,
That the deadly ruin should,
For thy sake, encompass him?
That the Master-word should lie
A mere silence, while his own
Processive harmony,
The faintest echo of his lightest tone,
Is sweeping in a choral triumph by?
Awake! emit a cry!
And say, albeit used
From Adam's ancient years
To falls of acrid tears,
To frequent sighs unloosed,
Caught back to press again
On bosoms zoned with pain —
To corses still and sullen
The shine and music dulling
With closèd eyes and ears
That nothing sweet can enter,
Commoving thee no less
With that forced quietness
Than the earthquake in thy centre —
Thou hast not learnt to bear
This new divine despair!
These tears that sink into thee,
These dying eyes that view thee,
This dropping blood from lifted rood,
They darken and undo thee.
Thou canst not presently sustain this corse —
Cry, cry, thou hast not force!
Cry, thou wouldst fainer keep
Thy hopeless charnels deep,
Thyself a general tomb
Where the first and the second Death
Sit gazing face to face
And mar each other's breath,
While silent bones through all the place
'Neath sun and moon do faintly glisten
And seem to lie and listen

For the tramp of the coming Doom.
Is it not meet
That they who erst the Eden fruit did eat,
Should champ the ashes ?
That they who wrap them in the thunder-cloud
Should wear it as a shroud,
Perishing by its flashes ?
That they who vexed the lion should be rent ?
Cry, cry, 'I will sustain my punishment,
The sin being mine; but take away from me
This visioned Dread — this man — this Deity !'
The Earth. I have groaned; I have travailed: I am weary.
I am blind with my own grief, and cannot see,
As clear-eyed angels can, his agony,
And what I see I also can sustain,
Because his power protects me from his pain.
I have groaned; I have travailed: I am dreary,
Hearkening the thick sobs of my children's heart:
How can I say 'Depart'
To that Atoner making calm and free ?
Am I a God as he,
To lay down peace and power as willingly ?
Ador. He looked for some to pity. There is none.
All pity is within him and not for him,
His earth is iron under him, and o'er him
His skies are brass.
His seraphs cry 'Alas !'
With hallelujah voices that cannot weep.
And man, for whom the dreadful work is done . . .
Scornful Voices from the Earth. If verily this *be* the Eternal's son —
Ador. Thou hearest. Man is grateful.
Zerah. Can I hear
Nor darken into man and cease for ever
My seraph-smile to wear ?
Was it for such,
It pleased him to overleap
His glory with his love and sever
From the God-light and the throne
And all angels bowing down,
For whom his every look did touch
New notes of joy on the unworn string
Of an eternal worshipping ?
For such, he left his heaven ?
There, though never bought by blood
And tears, we gave him gratitude:
We loved him there, though unforgiven.
Ador. The light is risen
Above, around,
And down in lurid fragments flung,
That catch the mountain-peak and stream
With momentary gleam,
Then perish in the water and the ground.
River and waterfall,
Forest and wilderness,
Mountain and city, are together wrung
Into one shape, and that is shapelessness;
The darkness stands for all.
Zerah. The pathos hath the day undone:
The death-look of his eyes
Hath overcome the sun
And made it sicken in its narrow skies.
Ador. Is it to death ? He dieth.
Zerah. Through the dark
He still, he only, is discernible —
The naked hands and feet transfixèd stark,
The countenance of patient anguish white,
Do make themselves a light
More dreadful than the glooms which round them dwell,
And therein do they shine.
Ador. God ! Father-God !
Perpetual Radiance on the radiant throne !
Uplift the lids of inward deity,
Flashing abroad
Thy burning Infinite !
Light up this dark where there is nought to see
Except the unimagined agony
Upon the sinless forehead of the Son !
Zerah. God, tarry not ! Behold, enow
Hath he wandered as a stranger,
Sorrowed as a victim. Thou
Appear for him, O Father !
Appear for him, Avenger !
Appear for him, just One and holy One,
For he is holy and just !
At once the darkness and dishonor rather
To the ragged jaws of hungry chaos rake,
And hurl aback to ancient dust
These mortals that make blasphemies
With their made breath, this earth and skies

That only grow a little dim,
Seeing their curse on him.
But him, of all forsaken,
Of creature and of brother,
Never wilt thou forsake!
Thy living and thy loving cannot slacken
Their firm essential hold upon each other,
And well thou dost remember how his part
Was still to lie upon thy breast and be
Partaker of the light that dwelt in thee
Ere sun or seraph shone;
And how while silence trembled round the throne
Thou countedst by the beatings of his heart
The moments of thine own eternity.
Awaken,
O right hand with the lightnings! Again gather
His glory to thy glory! What estranger,
What ill supreme in evil, can be thrust
Between the faithful Father and the Son?
Appear for him, O Father!
Appear for him, Avenger!
Appear for him, just One and holy One,
For he is holy and just!
Ador. Thy face upturned toward the throne is dark;
Thou hast no answer, Zerah.
Zerah. No reply,
O unforsaking Father?
Ador. Hark!
Instead of downward voice, a cry
Is uttered from beneath.
Zerah. And by a sharper sound than death,
Mine immortality is riven.
The heavy darkness which doth tent the sky
Floats backward as by a sudden wind:
But I see no light behind,
But I feel the farthest stars are all
Stricken and shaken,
And I know a shadow sad and broad
Doth fall — doth fall
On our vacant thrones in heaven.
Voice from the Cross. MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU ME FORSAKEN?
The Earth. Ah me, ah me, ah me! the dreadful Why!
My sin is on thee, sinless one! Thou art
God-orphaned, for my burden on thy head.
Dark sin, white innocence, endurance dread!
Be still, within your shrouds, my buried dead;
Nor work with this quick horror round mine heart.
Zerah. *He* hath forsaken *him.* I perish.
Ador. Hold
Upon his name! we perish not. Of old
His will —
Zerah. I seek his will. Seek, seraphim!
My God, my God! where is it? Doth that curse
Reverberate spare us, seraph or universe?
He hath forsaken *him.*
Ador. He cannot fail.
Angel Voices. We faint, we droop,
Our love doth tremble like fear.
Voices of Fallen Angels from the Earth. Do we prevail?
Or are we lost? Hath not the ill we did
Been heretofore our good?
Is it not ill that one, all sinless, should
Hang heavy with all curses on a cross?
Nathless, that cry! With huddled faces hid
Within the empty graves which men did scoop
To hold more damnèd dead, we shudder through
What shall exalt us or undo,
Our triumph, or our loss.
Voice from the Cross. IT IS FINISHED.
Zerah. Hark, again!
Like a victor speaks the slain.
Angel Voices. Finished be the trembling vain!
Ador. Upward, like a well-loved son,
Looketh he, the orphaned one.
Angel Voices. Finished is the mystic pain.
Voices of Fallen Angels. His deathly forehead at the word,
Gleameth like a seraph sword.
Angel Voices. Finished is the demon reign.
Ador. His breath, as living God, createth,
His breath, as dying man, completeth.
Angel Voices. Finished work his hands sustain.
The Earth. In mine ancient sepulchres
Where my kings and prophets freeze,
Adam dead four thousand years,
Unwakened by the universe's
Everlasting moan,
Aye his ghastly silence mocking —
Unwakened by his children's knocking
At his old sepulchral stone,

'Adam, Adam, all this curse is
Thine and on us yet!" —
Unwakened by the ceaseless tears
Wherewith they made his cerement wet,
'Adam, must thy curse remain?' —
Starts with sudden life and hears
Through the slow dripping of the caverned eaves, —
Angel Voices. Finished is his bane.
Voice from the Cross. FATHER! MY SPIRIT TO THINE HANDS IS GIVEN.
Ador. Hear the wailing winds that be
By wings of unclean spirits made!
They, in that last look, surveyed
The love they lost in losing heaven,
And passionately flee
With a desolate cry that cleaves
The natural storms — though *they* are lifting
God's strong cedar-roots like leaves,
And the earthquake and the thunder,
Neither keeping either under,
Roar and hurtle through the glooms —
And a few pale stars are drifting
Past the dark, to disappear,
What time, from the splitting tombs
Gleamingly the dead arise,
Viewing with their death-calmed eyes
The elemental strategies,
To witness, victory is the Lord's.
Hear the wail o' the spirits! hear!
Zerah. I hear alone the memory of his words.

EPILOGUE

I

My song is done.
My voice that long hath faltered shall be still.
The mystic darkness drops from Calvary's hill
Into the common light of this day's sun.

II

I see no more thy cross, O holy Slain!
I hear no more the horror and the coil
Of the great world's turmoil
Feeling thy countenance *too still*, — nor yell
Of demons sweeping past it to their prison.
The skies that turned to darkness with thy pain
Make now a summer's day;
And on my changèd ear that sabbath bell
Records how CHRIST IS RISEN.

III

And I — ah! what am I
To counterfeit, with faculty earth-darkened,
Seraphic brows of light
And seraph language never used nor hearkened?
Ah me! what word that seraphs say, could come
From mouth so used to sighs, so soon to lie
Sighless, because then breathless, in the tomb?

IV

Bright ministers of God and grace — of grace
Because of God! whether ye bow adown
In your own heaven, before the living face
Of him who died and deathless wears the crown,
Or whether at this hour ye haply are
Anear, around me, hiding in the night
Of this permitted ignorance your light,
This feebleness to spare, —
Forgive me, that mine earthly heart should dare
Shape images of unincarnate spirits
And lay upon their burning lips a thought
Cold with the weeping which mine earth inherits.
And though ye find in such hoarse music, wrought
To copy yours, a cadence all the while
Of sin and sorrow — only pitying smile!
Ye know to pity, well.

V

I too may haply smile another day
At the far recollection of this lay,
When God may call me in your midst to dwell,
To hear your most sweet music's miracle
And see your wondrous faces. May it be!
For his remembered sake, the Slain on rood,
Who rolled his earthly garment red in blood
(Treading the wine-press) that the weak, like me,
Before his heavenly throne should walk in white.

THE POET'S VOW

> 'O be wiser thou,
> Instructed that true knowledge leads to love.'
> —*Wordsworth.*

First printed in the *New Monthly Magazine* October, 1836. The author says in her preface to *The Seraphim and other Poems* that 'The Poet's Vow' 'was written to enforce the truth that the creature cannot be isolated from the creature.

PART THE FIRST

SHOWING WHEREFORE THE VOW WAS MADE

I

Eve is a twofold mystery;
The stillness Earth doth keep,
The motion wherewith human hearts
Do each to either leap
As if all souls between the poles
Felt 'Parting comes in sleep.'

II

The rowers lift their oars to view
Each other in the sea;
The landsmen watch the rocking boats
In a pleasant company;
While up the hill go gladlier still
Dear friends by two and three.

III

The peasant's wife hath looked without
Her cottage door and smiled,
For there the peasant drops his spade
To clasp his youngest child
Which hath no speech, but its hand can reach
And stroke his forehead mild.

IV

A poet sate that eventide
Within his hall alone,
As silent as its ancient lords
In the coffined place of stone,
When the bat hath shrunk from the praying monk,
And the praying monk is gone.

V

Nor wore the dead a stiller face
Beneath the cerement's roll:
His lips refusing out in words
Their mystic thoughts to dole,
His steadfast eye burnt inwardly,
As burning out his soul.

VI

You would not think that brow could e'er
Ungentle moods express,
Yet seemed it, in this troubled world,
Too calm for gentleness,
When the very star that shines from far
Shines trembling ne'ertheless.

VII

It lacked, all need, the softening light
Which other brows supply:
We should conjoin the scathèd trunks
Of our humanity,
That each leafless spray entwining may
Look softer 'gainst the sky.

VIII

None gazed within the poet's face,
The poet gazed in none;
He threw a lonely shadow straight
Before the moon and sun,
Affronting nature's heaven-dwelling creatures
With wrong to nature done:

IX

Because this poet daringly,
— The nature at his heart,
And that quick tune along his veins
He could not change by art, —
Had vowed his blood of brotherhood
To a stagnant place apart.

X

He did not vow in fear, or wrath,
Or grief's fantastic whim,
But, weights and shows of sensual things
Too closely crossing him,
On his soul's eyelid the pressure slid
And made its vision dim.

XI

And darkening in the dark he strove
'Twixt earth and sea and sky
To lose in shadow, wave and cloud,
His brother's haunting cry:
The winds were welcome as they swept,
God's five-day work he would accept,
But let the rest go by.

XII

He cried, 'O touching, patient Earth
That weepest in thy glee,
Whom God created very good,
And very mournful, we!
Thy voice of moan doth reach his throne,
As Abel's rose from thee.

XIII

'Poor crystal sky with stars astray!
Mad winds that howling go
From east to west! perplexèd seas
That stagger from their blow!
O motion wild! O wave defiled!
Our curse hath made you so.

XIV

'*We!* and *our* curse! do *I* partake
The desiccating sin?
Have *I* the apple at my lips?
The money-lust within?
Do *I* human stand with the wounding hand,
To the blasting heart akin?

XV

'Thou solemn pathos of all things
For solemn joy designed!
Behold, submissive to your cause,
A holy wrath I find,
And, for your sake, the bondage break
That knits me to my kind.

XVI

'Hear me forswear man's sympathies,
His pleasant yea and no,
His riot on the piteous earth
Whereon his thistles grow,
His changing love — with stars above,
His pride — with graves below.

XVII

'Hear me forswear his roof by night,
His bread and salt by day,
His talkings at the wood-fire hearth,
His greetings by the way,
His answering looks, his systemed books,
All man, for aye and aye.

XVIII

'That so my purged, once human heart,
From all the human rent,
May gather strength to pledge and drink
Your wine of wonderment,
While you pardon me all blessingly
The woe mine Adam sent.

XIX

'And I shall feel your unseen looks
Innumerous, constant, deep
And soft as haunted Adam once,
Though sadder, round me creep, —
As slumbering men have mystic ken
Of watchers on their sleep.

XX

'And ever, when I lift my brow
At evening to the sun,
No voice of woman or of child
Recording "Day is done" —
Your silences shall a love express,
More deep than such an one.'

PART THE SECOND

SHOWING TO WHOM THE VOW WAS DECLARED

I

The poet's vow was inly sworn,
The poet's vow was told.
He shared among his crowding friends
The silver and the gold,
They clasping bland his gift, — his hand
In a somewhat slacker hold.

II

They wended forth, the crowding friends,
With farewells smooth and kind.
They wended forth, the solaced friends,
And left but twain behind:
One loved him true as brothers do,
And one was Rosalind.

III

He said, 'My friends have wended forth
With farewells smooth and kind;
Mine oldest friend, my plighted bride,
Ye need not stay behind:
Friend, wed my fair bride for my sake,
And let my lands ancestral make
A dower for Rosalind.

IV

'And when beside your wassail board
Ye bless your social lot,
I charge you that the giver be

In all his gifts forgot,
Or alone of all his words recall
The last, — Lament me not.'

V

She looked upon him silently
With her large, doubting eyes,
Like a child that never knew but love
Whom words of wrath surprise,
Till the rose did break from either cheek
And the sudden tears did rise.

VI

She looked upon him mournfully,
While her large eyes were grown
Yet larger with the steady tears,
Till, all his purpose known,
She turnèd slow, as she would go —
The tears were shaken down.

VII

She turnèd slow, as she would go,
Then quickly turned again,
And gazing in his face to seek
Some little touch of pain,
'I thought,' she said, — but shook her head, —
She tried that speech in vain.

VIII

'I thought — but I am half a child
And very sage art thou —
The teachings of the heaven and earth
Should keep us soft and low:
They have drawn *my* tears in early years,
Or ere I wept — as now.

IX

'But now that in thy face I read
Their cruel homily,
Before their beauty I would fain
Untouched, unsoftened be, —
If I indeed could look on even
The senseless, loveless earth and heaven
As thou canst look on me!

X

'And couldest thou as coldly view
Thy childhood's far abode,
Where little feet kept time with thine
Along the dewy sod,
And thy mother's look from holy book
Rose like a thought of God?

XI

'O brother, — called so, ere her last
Betrothing words were said!
O fellow-watcher in her room,
With hushèd voice and tread!
Rememberest thou how, hand in hand
O friend, O lover, we did stand,
And knew that she was dead?

XII

'I will not live Sir Roland's bride,
That dower I will not hold;
I tread below my feet that go,
These parchments bought and sold:
The tears I weep are mine to keep,
And worthier than thy gold.'

XIII

The poet and Sir Roland stood
Alone, each turned to each,
Till Roland brake the silence left
By that soft-throbbing speech —
'Poor heart!' he cried, 'it vainly tried
The distant heart to reach.

XIV

'And thou, O distant, sinful heart
That climbest up so high
To wrap and blind thee with the snows
That cause to dream and die,
What blessing can, from lips of man,
Approach thee with his sigh?

XV

'Ay, what from earth — create for man
And moaning in his moan?
Ay, what from stars — revealed to man
And man-named one by one?
Ay, more! what blessing can be given
Where the Spirits seven do show in heaven
A MAN upon the throne?

XVI

'A man on earth HE wandered once,
All meek and undefiled,
And those who loved Him said 'He wept' —
None ever said He smiled;
Yet there might have been a smile unseen,
When He bowed his holy face, I ween,
To bless that happy child.

XVII

'And now HE pleadeth up in heaven
For our humanities,
Till the ruddy light on seraphs' wings
In pale emotion dies.
They can better bear their Godhead's glare
Than the pathos of his eyes.

XVIII

'I will go pray our God to-day
To teach thee how to scan
His work divine, for human use
Since earth on axle ran, —
To teach thee to discern as plain
His grief divine, the blood-drop's stain
He left there, MAN for man.

XIX

'So, for the blood's sake shed by Him
Whom angels God declare,
Tears like it, moist and warm with love,
Thy reverent eyes shall wear
To see i' the face of Adam's race
The nature God doth share.'

XX

'I heard,' the poet said, 'thy voice
As dimly as thy breath:
The sound was like the noise of life
To one anear his death, —
Or of waves that fail to stir the pale
Sere leaf they roll beneath.

XXI

'And still between the sound and me
White creatures like a mist
Did interfloat confusedly,
Mysterious shapes unwist:
Across my heart and across my brow
I felt them droop like wreaths of snow,
To still the pulse they kist.

XXII

'The castle and its lands are thine —
The poor's — it shall be done.
Go, *man*, to love! I go to live
In Courland hall, alone:
The bats along the ceilings cling,
The lizards in the floors do run,
And storms and years have worn and reft
The stain by human builders left
In working at the stone.'

PART THE THIRD

SHOWING HOW THE VOW WAS KEPT

I

He dwelt alone, and sun and moon
Were witness that he made
Rejection of his humanness
Until they seemed to fade;
His face did so, for he did grow
Of his own soul afraid.

II

The self-poised God may dwell alone
With inward glorying,
But God's chief angel waiteth for
A brother's voice, to sing;
And a lonely creature of sinful nature
It is an awful thing.

III

An awful thing that feared itself;
While many years did roll,
A lonely man, a feeble man,
A part beneath the whole,
He bore by day, he bore by night
That pressure of God's infinite
Upon his finite soul.

IV

The poet at his lattice sate,
And downward lookèd he.
Three Christians wended by to prayers,
With mute ones in their ee;
Each turned above a face of love
And called him to the far chapèlle
With voice more tuneful than its bell:
But still they wended three.

V

There journeyed by a bridal pomp,
A bridegroom and his dame;
He speaketh low for happiness,
She blusheth red for shame:
But never a tone of benison
From out the lattice came.

VI

A little child with inward song,
No louder noise to dare,
Stood near the wall to see at play
The lizards green and rare —
Unblessed the while for his childish smile
Which cometh unaware.

PART THE FOURTH

SHOWING HOW ROSALIND FARED BY THE KEEPING OF THE VOW

I

In death-sheets lieth Rosalind
As white and still as they;
And the old nurse that watched her bed
Rose up with 'Well-a-day!'
And oped the casement to let in
The sun, and that sweet doubtful din
Which droppeth from the grass and bough
Sans wind and bird, none knoweth how —
To cheer her as she lay.

II

The old nurse started when she saw
Her sudden look of woe:
But the quick wan tremblings round her mouth
In a meek smile did go,
And calm she said, 'When I am dead,
Dear nurse, it shall be so.

III

'Till then, shut out those sights and sounds,
And pray God pardon me
That I without this pain no more
His blessèd works can see!
And lean beside me, loving nurse,
That thou mayst hear, ere I am worse,
What thy last love should be.'

IV

The loving nurse leant over her,
As white she lay beneath;
The old eyes searching, dim with life,
The young ones dim with death,
To read their look if sound forsook
The trying, trembling breath.

V

'When all this feeble breath is done,
And I on bier am laid,
My tresses smoothed for never a feast,
My body in shroud arrayed,
Uplift each palm in a saintly calm,
As if that still I prayed.

VI

'And heap beneath mine head the flowers
You stoop so low to pull,
The little white flowers from the wood
Which grow there in the cool,
Which *he* and I, in childhood's games,
Went plucking, knowing not their names,
And filled thine apron full.

VII

'Weep not! *I* weep not. Death is strong,
The eyes of Death are dry!
But lay this scroll upon my breast
When hushed its heavings lie,
And wait awhile for the corpse's smile
Which shineth presently.

VIII

'And when it shineth, straightway call
Thy youngest children dear,
And bid them gently carry me
All barefaced on the bier;
But bid them pass my kirkyard grass
That waveth long anear.

IX

'And up the bank where I used to sit
And dream what life would be,
Along the brook with its sunny look
Akin to living glee, —
O'er the windy hill, through the forest still,
Let them gently carry me.

X

'And through the piny forest still,
And down the open moorland
Round where the sea beats mistily
And blindly on the foreland;
And let them chant that hymn I know,
Bearing me soft, bearing me slow,
To the ancient hall of Courland.

XI

'And when withal they near the hall,
In silence let them lay
My bier before the bolted door,
And leave it for a day:
For I have vowed, though I am proud,
To go there as a guest in shroud,
And not be turned away.'

XII

The old nurse looked within her eyes
Whose mutual look was gone;
The old nurse stooped upon her mouth,
Whose answering voice was done;
And nought she heard, till a little bird

Upon the casement's woodbine swinging
Broke out into a loud sweet singing
For joy o' the summer sun:
'Alack! alack!'—she watched no more,
With head on knee she wailèd sore,
And the little bird sang o'er and o'er
For joy o' the summer sun.

PART THE FIFTH

SHOWING HOW THE VOW WAS BROKEN

I

The poet oped his bolted door
The midnight sky to view;
A spirit-feel was in the air
Which seemed to touch his spirit bare
Whenever his breath he drew;
And the stars a liquid softness had,
As alone their holiness forbade
Their falling with the dew.

II

They shine upon the steadfast hills,
Upon the swinging tide,
Upon the narrow track of beach
And the murmuring pebbles pied:
They shine on every lovely place,
They shine upon the corpse's face,
As *it* were fair beside.

III

It lay before him, humanlike,
Yet so unlike a thing!
More awful in its shrouded pomp
Than any crownèd king:
All calm and cold, as it did hold
Some secret, glorying.

IV

A heavier weight than of its clay
Clung to his heart and knee:
As if those folded palms could strike
He staggered groaningly,
And then o'erhung, without a groan,
The meek close mouth that smiled alone,
Whose speech the scroll must be.

THE WORDS OF ROSALIND'S SCROLL

'I left thee last, a child at heart,
A woman scarce in years.
I come to thee, a solemn corpse
Which neither feels nor fears.
I have no breath to use in sighs;
They laid the dead-weights on mine eyes
To seal them safe from tears.

'Look on me with thine own calm look:
I meet it calm as thou.
No look of thine can change *this* smile,
Or break thy sinful vow:
I tell thee that my poor scorned heart
Is of thine earth—thine earth, a part:
It cannot vex thee now.

'But out, alas! these words are writ
By a living, loving one,
Adown whose cheeks, the proofs of life,
The warm quick tears do run:
Ah, let the unloving corpse control
Thy scorn back from the loving soul
Whose place of rest is won.

'I have prayed for thee with bursting sob
When passion's course was free;
I have prayed for thee with silent lips,
In the anguish none could see:
They whispered oft, "She sleepeth soft"—
But I only prayed for thee.

'Go to! I pray for thee no more:
The corpse's tongue is still,
Its folded fingers point to heaven,
But point there stiff and chill:
No farther wrong, no farther woe
Hath license from the sin below
Its tranquil heart to thrill.

'I charge thee, by the living's prayer,
And the dead's silentness,
To wring from out thy soul a cry
Which God shall hear and bless!
Lest Heaven's own palm droop in my hand,
And pale among the saints I stand,
A saint companionless.'

V

Bow lower down before the throne,
Triumphant Rosalind!
He boweth on thy corpse his face,
And weepeth as the blind:
'T was a dread sight to see them so,
For the senseless corpse rocked to and fro
With the wail of his living mind.

VI

But dreader sight, could such be seen,
His inward mind did lie,
Whose long-subjected humanness
Gave out its lion-cry,
And fiercely rent its tenement
In a mortal agony.

VII

I tell you, friends, had you heard his wail,
'T would haunt you in court and mart,
And in merry feast until you set
Your cup down to depart —
That weeping wild of a reckless child
From a proud man's broken heart.

VIII

O broken heart, O broken vow,
That wore so proud a feature!
God, grasping as a thunderbolt
The man's rejected nature,
Smote him therewith i' the presence high
Of his so worshipped earth and sky
That looked on all indifferently —
A wailing human creature.

IX

A human creature found too weak
To bear his human pain —
(May Heaven's dear grace have spoken peace
To his dying heart and brain!)
For when they came at dawn of day
To lift the lady's corpse away,
Her bier was holding twain.

X

They dug beneath the kirkyard grass,
For both one dwelling deep;
To which, when years had mossed the stone,
Sir Roland brought his little son
To watch the funeral heap:
And when the happy boy would rather
Turn upward his blithe eyes to see
The wood-doves nodding from the tree,
'Nay, boy, look downward,' said his father,
'Upon this human dust asleep.
And hold it in thy constant ken
That God's own unity compresses
(One into one) the human many,
And that his everlastingness is
The bond which is not loosed by any:
That thou and I this law must keep,
If not in love, in sorrow then, —
Though smiling not like other men,
Still, like them we must weep.'

THE ROMAUNT OF MARGRET

'Can my affections find out nothing best,
But still and still remove?' — *Quarles.*

First printed in the *New Monthly Magazine*, July, 1836. For this poem, as for the preceding, a distinct moral purpose was claimed by the author, to show, namely, 'that the creature cannot be *sustained* by the creature.'

I

I PLANT a tree whose leaf
The yew-tree leaf will suit:
But when its shade is o'er you laid,
Turn round and pluck the fruit.
Now reach my harp from off the wall
Where shines the sun aslant;
The sun may shine and we be cold!
O hearken, loving hearts and bold,
Unto my wild romaunt.
Margret, Margret.

II

Sitteth the fair ladye
Close to the river side
Which runneth on with a merry tone
Her merry thoughts to guide:
It runneth through the trees,
It runneth by the hill,
Nathless the lady's thoughts have found
A way more pleasant still.
Margret, Margret.

III

The night is in her hair
And giveth shade to shade,
And the pale moonlight on her forehead white
Like a spirit's hand is laid;
Her lips part with a smile
Instead of speakings done:
I ween, she thinketh of a voice,
Albeit uttering none.
Margret, Margret.

IV

All little birds do sit
With heads beneath their wings:
Nature doth seem in a mystic dream,
Absorbed from her living things:

That dream by that ladye
Is certes unpartook,
For she looketh to the high cold stars
With a tender human look.
Margret, Margret.

V

The lady's shadow lies
Upon the running river;
It lieth no less in its quietness,
For that which resteth never:
Most like a trusting heart
Upon a passing faith,
Or as upon the course of life
The steadfast doom of death.
Margret, Margret.

VI

The lady doth not move,
The lady doth not dream,
Yet she seeth her shade no longer laid
In rest upon the stream:
It shaketh without wind,
It parteth from the tide,
It standeth upright in the cleft moonlight,
It sitteth at her side.
Margret, Margret.

VII

Look in its face, ladye,
And keep thee from thy swound;
With a spirit bold thy pulses hold
And hear its voice's sound:
For so will sound thy voice
When thy face is to the wall,
And such will be thy face, ladye,
When the maidens work thy pall.
Margret, Margret.

VIII

'Am I not like to thee?'
The voice was calm and low,
And between each word you might have heard
The silent forests grow;
'*The like may sway the like;*'
By which mysterious law
Mine eyes from thine and my lips from thine
The light and breath may draw.
Margret, Margret.

IX

'My lips do need thy breath,
My lips do need thy smile,
And my pallid eyne, that light in thine
Which met the stars erewhile:
Yet go with light and life
If that thou lovest one
In all the earth who loveth thee
As truly as the sun,
Margret, Margret.'

X

Her cheek had waxèd white
Like cloud at fall of snow;
Then like to one at set of sun,
It waxèd red alsò;
For love's name maketh bold
As if the loved were near:
And then she sighed the deep long sigh
Which cometh after fear.
Margret, Margret.

XI

'Now, sooth, I fear thee not—
Shall never fear thee now!'
(And a noble sight was the sudden light
Which lit her lifted brow.)
'Can earth be dry of streams,
Or hearts of love?' she said;
'Who doubteth love, can know not love:
He is already dead.'
Margret, Margret.

XII

'I have' . . . and here her lips
Some word in pause did keep,
And gave the while a quiet smile
As if they paused in sleep,—
'I have . . . a brother dear,
A knight of knightly fame!
I broidered him a knightly scarf
With letters of my name
Margret, Margret.

XIII

'I fed his gray goshawk,
I kissed his fierce bloodhoùnd,
I sate at home when he might come
And caught his horn's far sound:
I sang him hunter's songs,
I poured him the red wine,
He looked across the cup and said,
I love thee, sister mine.'
Margret, Margret.

XIV

IT trembled on the grass
With a low, shadowy laughter:

The sounding river which rolled, for ever
Stood dumb and stagnant after:
'Brave knight thy brother is!
But better loveth he
Thy chaliced wine than thy chaunted song,
And better both than thee,
Margret, Margret.'

XV

The lady did not heed
The river's silence while
Her own thoughts still ran at their will,
And calm was still her smile.
'My little sister wears
The look our mother wore:
I smooth her locks with a golden comb,
I bless her evermore.'
Margret, Margret.

XVI

'I gave her my first bird
When first my voice it knew;
I made her share my posies rare
And told her where they grew:
I taught her God's dear name
With prayer and praise to tell,
She looked from heaven into my face
And said, *I love thee well.*'
Margret, Margret.

XVII

IT trembled on the grass
With a low, shadowy laughter;
You could see each bird as it woke and stared
Through the shrivelled foliage after.
'Fair child thy sister is!
But better loveth she
Thy golden comb than thy gathered flowers,
And better both than thee,
Margret, Margret.'

XVIII

Thy lady did not heed
The withering on the bough;
Still calm her smile, albeit the while
A little pale her brow:
'I have a father old,
The lord of ancient halls;
An hundred friends are in his court
Yet only me he calls.
Margret, Margret.

XIX

'An hundred knights are in his court
Yet read I by his knee;
And when forth they go to the tourney show
I rise not up to see:
'T is a weary book to read,
My tryst 's at set of sun,
But loving and dear beneath the stars
Is his blessing when I 've done.'
Margret, Margret.

XX

IT trembled on the grass
With a low, shadowy laughter;
And moon and stars though bright and fa
Did shrink and darken after.
'High lord thy father is!
But better loveth he
His ancient halls than his hundred friends,
His ancient halls, than thee,
Margret, Margret.'

XXI

The lady did not heed
That the far stars did fail;
Still calm her smile, albeit the while . . .
Nay, but she is not pale!
'I have more than a friend
Across the mountains dim:
No other's voice is soft to me,
Unless it nameth *him*.'
Margret. Margret.

XXII

'Though louder beats my heart,
I know his tread again,
And his fair plume aye, unless turned away,
For the tears do blind me then:
We brake no gold, a sign
Of stronger faith to be,
But I wear his last look in my soul,
Which said, *I love but thee!*'
Margret, Margret.

XXIII

IT trembled on the grass
With a low, shadowy laughter;

And the wind did toll, as a passing soul
Were sped by church-bell after;
And shadows, 'stead of light,
Fell from the stars above,
In flakes of darkness on her face
Still bright with trusting love.
Margret, Margret.

XXIV

'*He loved* but only thee!
That love is transient too.
The wild hawk's bill doth dabble still
I' the mouth that vowed thee true:
Will he open his dull eyes
When tears fall on his brow?
Behold, the death-worm to his heart
Is a nearer thing than *thou*,
Margret, Margret.'

XXV

Her face was on the ground —
None saw the agony;
But the men at sea did that night agree
They heard a drowning cry:
And when the morning brake,
Fast rolled the river's tide,
With the green trees waving overhead
And a white corse laid beside.
Margret, Margret.

XXVI

A knight's bloodhound and he
The funeral watch did keep;
With a thought o' the chase he stroked its face
As it howled to see him weep.
A fair child kissed the dead,
But shrank before its cold.
And alone yet proudly in his hall
Did stand a baron old.
Margret, Margret.

XXVII

Hang up my harp again!
I have no voice for song.
Not song but wail, and mourners pale,
Not bards, to love belong.
O failing human love!
O light, by darkness known!
O false, the while thou treadest earth!
O deaf beneath the stone!
Margret, Margret

ISOBEL'S CHILD

— 'so find we profit,
By losing of our prayers.'
— *Shakespeare.*

I

To rest the weary nurse has gone:
An eight-day watch had watchèd she,
Still rocking beneath sun and moon
The baby on her knee,
Till Isobel its mother said
'The fever waneth — wend to bed,
For now the watch comes round to me.'

II

Then wearily the nurse did throw
Her pallet in the darkest place
Of that sick room, and slept and dreamed:
For, as the gusty wind did blow
The night-lamp's flare across her face,
She saw or seemed to see, but dreamed,
That the poplars tall on the opposite hill
The seven tall poplars on the hill,
Did clasp the setting sun until
His rays dropped from him, pined and still
As blossoms in frost,
Till he waned and paled, so weirdly crossed,
To the color of moonlight which doth pass
Over the dank ridged churchyard grass.
The poplars held the sun, and he
The eyes of the nurse that they should not see
— Not for a moment, the babe on her knee,
Though she shuddered to feel that it grew to be
Too chill, and lay too heavily.

III

She only dreamed; for all the while
'T was Lady Isobel that kept
The little baby: and it slept
Fast, warm, as if its mother's smile,
Laden with love's dewy weight,
And red as rose of Harpocrate
Dropt upon its eyelids, pressed
Lashes to cheek in a sealèd rest.

IV

And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well —
She knew not that she smiled.
Against the lattice, dull and wild
Drive the heavy droning drops,

Drop by drop, the sound being one;
As momently time's segments fall
On the ear of God, who hears through all
Eternity's unbroken monotone:
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well —
She knew not that she smiled.
The wind in intermission stops
Down in the beechen forest,
Then cries aloud
As one at the sorest,
Self-stung, self-driven,
And rises up to its very tops,
Stiffening erect the branches bowed,
Dilating with a tempest-soul
The trees that with their dark hands break
Through their own outline, and heavy roll
Shadows as massive as clouds in heaven
Across the castle lake.
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well;
She knew not that she smiled;
She knew not that the storm was wild;
Through the uproar drear she could not hear
The castle clock which struck anear —
She heard the low, light breathing of her child.

V

O sight for wondering look!
While the external nature broke
Into such abandonment,
While the very mist, heart-rent
By the lightning, seemed to eddy
Against nature, with a din, —
A sense of silence and of steady
Natural calm appeared to come
From things without, and enter in
The human creature's room.

VI

So motionless she sate,
The babe asleep upon her knees,
You might have dreamed their souls had gone
Away to things inanimate,
In such to live, in such to moan;
And that their bodies had ta'en back,
In mystic change, all silences
That cross the sky in cloudy rack,
Or dwell beneath the reedy ground
In waters safe from their own sound:
Only she wore
The deepening smile I named before,
And *that* a deepening love expressed;
And who at once can love and rest?

VII

In sooth the smile that then was keeping
Watch upon the baby sleeping,
Floated with its tender light
Downward, from the drooping eyes,
Upward, from the lips apart,
Over cheeks which had grown white
With an eight-day weeping:
All smiles come in such a wise
Where tears shall fall or have of old —
Like northern lights that fill the heart
Of heaven in sign of cold.

VIII

Motionless she sate.
Her hair had fallen by its weight
On each side of her smile, and lay
Very blackly on the arm
Where the baby nestled warm,
Pale as baby carved in stone
Seen by glimpses of the moon
Up a dark cathedral aisle:
But, through the storm, no moonbeam fell
Upon the child of Isobel —
Perhaps you saw it by the ray
Alone of her still smile.

IX

A solemn thing it is to me
To look upon a babe that sleeps
Wearing in its spirit-deeps
The undeveloped mystery
Of our Adam's taint and woe,
Which, when they developed be,
Will not let it slumber so;
Lying new in life beneath
The shadow of the coming death,
With that soft, low, quiet breath,
As if it felt the sun;
Knowing all things by their blooms,
Not their roots, yea, sun and sky
Only by the warmth that comes
Out of each, earth only by
The pleasant hues that o'er it run,
And human love by drops of sweet
White nourishment still hanging round
The little mouth so slumber-bound:
All which broken sentiency
And conclusion incomplete,
Will gather and unite and climb
To an immortality

Good or evil, each sublime,
Through life and death to life again.
O little lids, now folded fast,
Must ye learn to drop at last
Our large and burning tears?
O warm quick body, must thou lie,
When the time comes round to die,
Still from all the whirl of years,
Bare of all the joy and pain?
O small frail being, wilt thou stand
At God's right hand,
Lifting up those sleeping eyes
Dilated by great destinies,
To an endless waking? thrones and seraphim,
Through the long ranks of their solemnities,
Sunning thee with calm looks of Heaven's surprise,
But thine alone on Him?
Or else, self-willed, to tread the Godless place,
(God keep thy will!) feel thine own energies
Cold, strong, objèctless, like a dead man's clasp,
The sleepless deathless life within thee grasp,—
While myriad faces, like one changeless face,
With woe *not love's*, shall glass thee everywhere
And overcome thee with thine own despair?

X

More soft, less solemn images
Drifted o'er the lady's heart
Silently as snow.
She had seen eight days depart
Hour by hour, on bended knees,
With pale-wrung hands and prayings low
And broken, through which came the sound
Of tears that fell against the ground,
Making sad stops:—'Dear Lord, dear Lord!'
She still had prayed, (the heavenly word
Broken by an earthly sigh)
—'Thou who didst not erst deny
The mother-joy to Mary mild,
Blessèd in the blessèd child
Which hearkened in meek babyhood
Her cradle-hymn, albeit used
To all that music interfused
In breasts of angels high and good!
Oh, take not, Lord, my babe away—
Oh, take not to thy songful heaven
The pretty baby thou hast given,
Or ere that I have seen him play
Around his father's knees and known
That *he* knew how my love has gone
From all the world to him.
Think, God among the cherubim,
How I shall shiver every day
In thy June sunshine, knowing where
The grave-grass keeps it from his fair
Still cheeks: and feel, at every tread,
His little body, which is dead
And hidden in thy turfy fold,
Doth make thy whole warm earth a-cold!
O God, I am so young, so young—
I am not used to tears at nights
Instead of slumber—not to prayer
With sobbing lips and hands out-wrung!
Thou knowest all my prayings were
'I bless thee, God, for past delights—
Thank God!' I am not used to bear
Hard thoughts of death; the earth doth cover
No face from me of friend or lover:
And must the first who teaches me
The form of shrouds and funerals, be
Mine own first-born belovèd? he
Who taught me first this mother-love?
Dear Lord who spreadest out above
Thy loving, transpierced hands to meet
All lifted hearts with blessing sweet,—
Pierce not my heart, my tender heart
Thou madest tender! Thou who art
So happy in thy heaven alway,
Take not mine only bliss away!'

XI

She so had prayed: and God, who hears
Through seraph-songs the sound of tears
From that belovèd babe had ta'en
The fever and the beating pain.
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well,
(She knew not that she smiled, I wis)
Until the pleasant gradual thought
Which near her heart the smile enwrought,
Now soft and slow, itself did seem
To float along a happy dream,
Beyond it into speech like this.

XII

'I prayed for thee, my little child,
And God has heard my prayer!
And when thy babyhood is gone,
We two together undefiled
By men's repinings, will kneel down

RENNER LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER
ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ELGIN, ILLINOIS

Upon his earth which will be fair
(Not covering thee, sweet !) to us twain,
And give Him thankful praise.'

XIII

Dully and wildly drives the rain:
Against the lattices drives the rain.

XIV

'I thank Him now, that I can think
Of those same future days,
Nor from the harmless image shrink
Of what I there might see —
Strange babies on their mothers' knee,
Whose innocent soft faces might
From off mine eyelids strike the light,
With looks not meant for me! '

XV

Gustily blows the wind through the rain,
As against the lattices drives the rain.

XVI

'But now, O baby mine, together,
We turn this hope of ours again
To many an hour of summer weather,
When we shall sit and intertwine
Our spirits, and instruct each other
In the pure loves of child and mother!
Two human loves make one divine.'

XVII

The thunder tears through the wind and the rain,
As full on the lattices drives the rain.

XVIII

'My little child, what wilt thou choose ?
Now let me look at thee and ponder.
What gladness, from the gladnesses
Futurity is spreading under
Thy gladsome sight ? Beneath the trees
Wilt thou lean all day, and lose
Thy spirit with the river seen
Intermittently between
The winding beechen alleys, —
Half in labor, half repose,
Like a shepherd keeping sheep,
Thou, with only thoughts to keep
Which never a bound will overpass,
And which are innocent as those
That feed among Arcadian valleys
Upon the dewy grass ? '

XIX

The large white owl that with age is blind,
That hath sate for years in the old tree hollow,
Is carried away in a gust of wind;
His wings could bear him not as fast
As he goeth now the lattice past;
He is borne by the winds, the rains do follow
His white wings to the blast outflowing,
He hooteth in going,
And still, in the lightnings, coldly glitter
His round unblinking eyes.

XX

'Or, baby, wilt thou think it fitter
To be eloquent and wise,
One upon whose lips the air
Turns to solemn verities
For men to breathe anew, and win
A deeper-seated life within ?
Wilt be a philosopher,
By whose voice the earth and skies
Shall speak to the unborn ?
Or a poet, broadly spreading
The golden immortalities
Of thy soul on natures lorn
And poor of such, them all to guard
From their decay, — beneath thy treading,
Earth's flowers recovering hues of Eden, —
And stars, drawn downward by thy looks,
To shine ascendant in thy books ? '

XXI

The tame hawk in the castle-yard,
How it screams to the lightning, with its wet
Jagged plumes overhanging the parapet !
And at the lady's door the hound
Scratches with a crying sound.

XXII

'But, O my babe, thy lids are laid
Close, fast upon thy cheek,
And not a dream of power and sheen
Can make a passage up between;
Thy heart is of thy mother's made,
Thy looks are very meek,
And it will be their chosen place
To rest on some belovèd face,
As these on thine, and let the noise
Of the whole world go on nor drown
The tender silence of thy joys:
Or when that silence shall have grown
Too tender for itself, the same

Yearning for sound, — to look above
And utter its one meaning, LOVE,
That *He* may hear his name.'

XXIII

No wind, no rain, no thunder !
The waters had trickled not slowly,
The thunder was not spent
Nor the wind near finishing;
Who would have said that the storm was diminishing ?
No wind, no rain, no thunder !
Their noises dropped asunder
From the earth and the firmament,
From the towers and the lattices,
Abrupt and echoless
As ripe fruits on the ground unshaken wholly —
As life in death !
And sudden and solemn the silence fell,
Startling the heart of Isobel
As the tempest could not:
Against the door went panting the breath
Of the lady's hound whose cry was still,
And she, constrained howe'er she would not,
Lifted her eyes and saw the moon
Looking out of heaven alone
Upon the poplared hill, —
A calm of God, made visible
That men might bless it at their will.

XXIV

The moonshine on the baby's face
Falleth clear and cold:
The mother's looks have fallen back
To the same place:
Because no moon with silver rack,
Nor broad sunrise in jasper skies
Has power to hold
Our loving eyes,
Which still revert, as ever must
Wonder and Hope, to gaze on the dust.

XXV

The moonshine on the baby's face
Cold and clear remaineth;
The mother's looks do shrink away, —
The mother's looks return to stay,
As charmèd by what paineth:
Is any glamour in the case ?
Is it dream, or is it sight ?
Hath the change upon the wild
Elements that sign the night,
Passed upon the child ?
It is not dream, but sight.

XXVI

The babe has awakened from sleep
And unto the gaze of its mother,
Bent over it, lifted another —
Not the baby-looks that go
Unaimingly to and fro,
But an earnest gazing deep
Such as soul gives soul at length
When by work and wail of years
It winneth a solemn strength
And mourneth as it wears.
A strong man could not brook,
With pulse unhurried by fears,
To meet that baby's look
O'erglazed by manhood's tears,
The tears of a man full grown,
With a power to wring our own,
In the eyes all undefiled
Of a little three-months child —
To see that babe-brow wrought
By the witnessing of thought
To judgment's prodigy,
And the small soft mouth unweaned,
By mother's kiss o'erleaned,
(Putting the sound of loving
Where no sound else was moving
Except the speechless cry)
Quickened to mind's expression,
Shaped to articulation,
Yea, uttering words, yea, naming woe,
In tones that with it strangely went
Because so baby-innocent,
As the child spake out to the mother, so: —

XXVII

'O mother, mother, loose thy prayer !
Christ's name hath made it strong.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me
With its most loving cruelty,
From floating my new soul along
The happy heavenly air.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me
In all this dark, upon this dull
Low earth, by only weepers trod.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me !
Mine angel looketh sorrowful
Upon the face of God.[1]

---

[1] For I say unto you that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven. — *Matt.* xviii. 10.

XXVIII

'Mother, mother, can I dream
Beneath your earthly trees?
I had a vision and a gleam,
I heard a sound more sweet than these
When rippled by the wind:
Did you see the Dove with wings
Bathed in golden glisterings
From a sunless light behind,
Dropping on me from the sky,
Soft as mother's kiss, until
I seemed to leap and yet was still?
Saw you how his love-large eye
Looked upon me mystic calms,
Till the power of his divine
Vision was indrawn to mine?

XXIX

'Oh, the dream within the dream!
I saw celestial places even.
Oh, the vistas of high palms
Making finites of delight
Through the heavenly infinite,
Lifting up their green still tops
To the heaven of heaven!
Oh, the sweet life-tree that drops
Shade like light across the river
Glorified in its for-ever
Flowing from the Throne!
Oh, the shining holinesses
Of the thousand, thousand faces
God-sunned by the thronèd ONE,
And made intense with such a love
That, though I saw them turned above,
Each loving seemed for also me!
And, oh, the Unspeakable, the HE,
The manifest in secrecies
Yet of mine own heart partaker
With the overcoming look
Of One who hath been once forsook
And blesseth the forsaker!
Mother, mother, let me go
Toward the Face that looketh so!
Through the mystic wingèd Four
Whose are inward, outward eyes
Dark with light of mysteries
And the restless evermore
"Holy, holy, holy," — through
The sevenfold Lamps that burn in view
Of cherubim and seraphim, —
Through the four-and-twenty crowned
Stately elders white around
Suffer me to go to Him!

XXX

'Is your wisdom very wise,
Mother, on the narrow earth,
Very happy, very worth
That I should stay to learn?
Are these air-corrupting sighs
Fashioned by unlearnèd breath?
Do the students' lamps that burn
All night, illumine death?
Mother, albeit this be so,
Loose thy prayer and let me go
Where that bright chief angel stands
Apart from all his brother bands,
Too glad for smiling, having bent
In angelic wilderment
O'er the depths of God, and brought
Reeling thence one only thought
To fill his own eternity.
He the teacher is for me —
He can teach what I would know —
Mother, mother, let me go!

XXXI

'Can your poet make an Eden
No winter will undo,
And light a starry fire while heeding
His hearth's is burning too?
Drown in music the earth's din,
And keep his own wild soul within
The law of his own harmony?
Mother, albeit this be so,
Let me to my heaven go!
A little harp me waits thereby,
A harp whose strings are golden all
And tuned to music spherical,
Hanging on the green life-tree
Where no willows ever be.
Shall I miss that harp of mine?
Mother, no! — the Eye divine
Turned upon it, makes it shine;
And when I touch it, poems sweet
Like separate souls shall fly from it,
Each to the immortal fytte.
We shall all be poets there,
Gazing on the chiefest Fair.

XXXII

'Love! earth's love! and *can* we love
Fixedly where all things move?
Can the sinning love each other?
Mother, mother,
I tremble in thy close embrace,
I feel thy tears adown my face,
Thy prayers do keep me out of bliss —

O dreary earthly love!
Loose thy prayer and let me go
To the place which loving is
Yet not sad; and when is given
Escape to *thee* from this below,
Thou shalt behold me that I wait
For thee beside the happy Gate,
And silence shall be up in heaven
To hear our greeting kiss.'

XXXIII

The nurse awakes in the morning sun,
And starts to see beside her bed
The lady with a grandeur spread
Like pathos o'er her face, as one
God-satisfied and earth-undone;
The babe upon her arm was dead:
And the nurse could utter forth no cry, —
She was awed by the calm in the mother's eye.

XXXIV

'Wake, nurse!' the lady said;
'*We* are waking — he and I —
I, on earth, and he, in sky:
And thou must help me to o'erlay
With garment white this little clay
Which needs no more our lullaby.

XXXV

'I changed the cruel prayer I made,
And bowed my meekened face, and prayed
That God would do his will; and thus
He did it, nurse! He parted us:
And his sun shows victorious
The dead calm face, — and *I* am calm,
And Heaven is hearkening a new psalm.

XXXVI

'This earthly noise is too anear,
Too loud, and will not let me hear
The little harp. My death will soon
Make silence.'

And a sense of tune,
A satisfièd love meanwhile
Which nothing earthly could despoil,
Sang on within her soul.

XXXVII

Oh you,
Earth's tender and impassioned few,
Take courage to entrust your love
To Him so named who guards above
Its ends and shall fulfil!
Breaking the narrow prayers that may
Befit your narrow hearts, away
In His broad, loving will.

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1838.

I

Seven maidens 'neath the midnight
Stand near the river-sea
Whose water sweepeth white around
The shadow of the tree;
The moon and earth are face to face,
And earth is slumbering deep;
The wave-voice seems the voice of dreams
That wander through her sleep:
The river floweth on.

II

What bring they 'neath the midnight,
Beside the river-sea?
They bring the human heart wherein
No nightly calm can be, —
That droppeth never with the wind,
Nor drieth with the dew:
Oh, calm in God! thy calm is broad
To cover spirits too.
The river floweth on.

III

The maidens lean them over
The waters, side by side,
And shun each other's deepening eyes,
And gaze adown the tide;
For each within a little boat
A little lamp hath put,
And heaped for freight some lily's weight
Or scarlet rose half shut.
The river floweth on.

IV

Of shell of cocoa carven
Each little boat is made;
Each carries a lamp, and carries a flower,
And carries a hope unsaid;
And when the boat hath carried the lamp
Unquenched till out of sight,
The maiden is sure that love will endure;
But love will fail with light.
The river floweth on.

V

Why, all the stars are ready
  To symbolize the soul,
The stars untroubled by the wind,
  Unwearied as they roll;
And yet the soul by instinct sad
  Reverts to symbols low —
To that small flame, whose very name
  Breathed o'er it, shakes it so!
      The river floweth on.

VI

Six boats are on the river,
  Seven maidens on the shore,
While still above them steadfastly
  The stars shine evermore.
Go, little boats, go soft and safe,
  And guard the symbol spark!
The boats aright go safe and bright
  Across the waters dark.
      The river floweth on.

VII

The maiden Luti watcheth
  Where onwardly they float:
That look in her dilating eyes
  Might seem to drive her boat:
Her eyes still mark the constant fire,
  And kindling unawares
That hopeful while, she lets a smile
  Creep silent through her prayers.
      The river floweth on.

VIII

The smile — where hath it wandered?
  She riseth from her knee,
She holds her dark, wet locks away —
  There is no light to see!
She cries a quick and bitter cry —
  'Nuleeni, launch me thine!
We must have light abroad to-night,
  For all the wreck of mine.'
      The river floweth on.

IX

'I do remember watching
  Beside this river-bed,
When on my childish knee was leaned
  My dying father's head;
I turned mine own to keep the tears
  From falling on his face:
What doth it prove when Death and Love
  Choose out the self-same place?'
      The river floweth on

X

'They say the dead are joyful
  The death-change here receiving:
Who say — ah me! who dare to say
  Where joy comes to the living?
Thy boat, Nuleeni! look not sad —
  Light up the waters rather!
I weep no faithless lover where
  I wept a loving father.'
      The river floweth on.

XI

'My heart foretold his falsehood
  Ere my little boat grew dim;
And though I closed mine eyes to dream
  That one last dream of *him*,
They shall not now be wet to see
  The shining vision go:
From earth's cold love I look above
  To the holy house of snow.'
      The river floweth on.

XII

'Come thou — thou never knewest
  A grief, that thou shouldst fear one!
Thou wearest still the happy look
  That shines beneath a dear one:
Thy humming-bird is in the sun,
  Thy cuckoo in the grove,
And all the three broad worlds, for thee
  Are full of wandering love.'
      The river floweth on.

XIII

'Why, maiden, dost thou loiter?
  What secret wouldst thou cover?
That peepul cannot hide thy boat,
  And I can guess thy lover;
I heard thee sob his name in sleep,
  It was a name I knew:
Come, little maid, be not afraid,
  But let us prove him true!'
      The river floweth on

XIV

The little maiden cometh,
  She cometh shy and slow;
I ween she seeth through her lids
  They drop adown so low:
Her tresses meet her small bare feet,
  She stands and speaketh nought,
Yet blusheth red as if she said
  The name she only thought
      The river floweth on

XV

She knelt beside the water,
She lighted up the flame,
And o'er her youthful forehead's calm
The fitful radiance came: —
'Go, little boat, go soft and safe,
And guard the symbol spark!'
Soft, safe doth float the little boat
Across the waters dark.
The river floweth on.

XVI

Glad tears her eyes have blinded,
The light they cannot reach;
She turneth with that sudden smile
She learnt before her speech —
'I do not hear his voice, the tears
Have dimmed my light away,
But the symbol light will last to-night,
The love will last for aye!'
The river floweth on.

XVII

Then Luti spake behind her,
Outspake she bitterly —
'By the symbol light that lasts to-night,
Wilt vow a vow to me?'
Nuleeni gazeth up her face,
Soft answer maketh she —
'By loves that last when lights are past,
I vow that vow to thee!'
The river floweth on.

XVIII

An earthly look had Luti
Though her voice was deep as prayer —
'The rice is gathered from the plains
To cast upon thine hair:
But when *he* comes his marriage-band
Around thy neck to throw,
Thy bride-smile raise to meet his gaze,
And whisper, — *There is one betrays,*
While Luti suffers woe.'
The river floweth on.

XIX

'And when in seasons after,
Thy little bright-faced son
Shall lean against thy knee and ask
What deeds his sire hath done, —
Press deeper down thy mother-smile
His glossy curls among,
View deep his pretty childish eyes,
And whisper, — *There is none denies,*
While Luti speaks of wrong.'
The river floweth on.

XX

Nuleeni looked in wonder,
Yet softly answered she —
'By loves that last when lights are past,
I vowed that vow to thee:
But why glads it thee that a bride-day be
By a word of *woe* defiled?
That a word of *wrong* take the cradle-song
From the ear of a sinless child?'
'Why?' Luti said, and her laugh was dread,
And her eyes dilated wild —
'That the fair new love may her bridegroom prove,
And the father shame the child!'
The river floweth on.

XXI

'Thou flowest still, O river,
Thou flowest 'neath the moon;
Thy lily hath not changed a leaf,
Thy charmèd lute a tune:
He mixed his voice with thine and *his*
Was all I heard around;
But now, beside his chosen bride,
I hear the river's sound.'
The river floweth on.

XXII

'I gaze upon her beauty
Through the tresses that enwreathe it;
The light above thy wave, is hers —
My rest, alone beneath it:
Oh, give me back the dying look
My father gave thy water!
Give back — and let a little love
O'erwatch his weary daughter!'
The river floweth on.

XXIII

'Give back!' she hath departed —
The word is wandering with her;
And the stricken maidens hear afar
The step and cry together.
Frail symbols? None are frail enow
For mortal joys to borrow! —
While bright doth float Nuleeni's boat,
She weepeth dark with sorrow.
The river floweth on.

AN ISLAND

'All goeth but Goddis will.' — *Old Poet.*

First printed in the *New Monthly Magazine*, January, 1837.

I

My dream is of an island-place
 Which distant seas keep lonely,
A little island on whose face
 The stars are watchers only:
Those bright still stars! they need not seem
Brighter or stiller in my dream.

II

An island full of hills and dells,
 All rumpled and uneven
With green recesses, sudden swells,
 And odorous valleys driven
So deep and straight that always there
The wind is cradled to soft air.

III

Hills running up to heaven for light
 Through woods that half-way ran,
As if the wild earth mimicked right
 The wilder heart of man:
Only it shall be greener far
And gladder than hearts ever are.

IV

More like, perhaps, that mountain piece
 Of Dante's paradise,
Disrupt to an hundred hills like these,
 In falling from the skies;
Bringing within it, all the roots
Of heavenly trees and flowers and fruits:

V

For — saving where the gray rocks strike
 Their javelins up the azure,
Or where deep fissures miser-like
 Hoard up some fountain treasure,
(And e'en in them, stoop down and hear,
Leaf sounds with water in your ear,) —

VI

The place is all awave with trees,
 Limes, myrtles purple-beaded,
Acacias having drunk the lees
 Of the night-dew, faint-headed,
And wan gray olive-woods which seem
The fittest foliage for a dream.

VII

Trees, trees on all sides! they combine
 Their plumy shades to throw,
Through whose clear fruit and blossom fine
 Whene'er the sun may go,
The ground beneath he deeply stains,
As passing through cathedral panes.

VIII

But little needs this earth of ours
 That shining from above her,
When many Pleiades of flowers
 (Not one lost) star her over,
The rays of their unnumbered hues
Being all refracted by the dews.

IX

Wide-petalled plants that boldly drink
 The Amreeta of the sky,
Shut bells that dull with rapture sink,
 And lolling buds, half shy;
I cannot count them, but between
Is room for grass and mosses green,

X

And brooks, that glass in different strengths
 All colors in disorder,
Or, gathering up their silver lengths
 Beside their winding border,
Sleep, haunted through the slumber hidden,
By lilies white as dreams in Eden.

XI

Nor think each archèd tree with each
 Too closely interlaces
To admit of vistas out of reach,
 And broad moon-lighted places
Upon whose sward the antlered deer
May view their double image clear.

XII

For all this island's creature-full,
 (Kept happy not by halves)
Mild cows, that at the vine-wreaths pull,
 Then low back at their calves
With tender lowings, to approve
The warm mouths milking them for love.

XIII

Free gamesome horses, antelopes,
 And harmless leaping leopards,
And buffaloes upon the slopes,
 And sheep unruled by shepherds:

Hares, lizards, hedgehogs, badgers, mice,
Snakes, squirrels, frogs, and butterflies.

XIV

And birds that live there in a crowd,
  Horned owls, rapt nightingales,
Larks bold with heaven, and peacocks proud,
  Self-sphered in those grand tails;
All creatures glad and safe, I deem.
No guns nor springes in my dream!

XV

The island's edges are a-wing
  With trees that overbranch
The sea with song-birds welcoming
  The curlews to green change;
And doves from half-closed lids espy
The red and purple fish go by.

XVI

One dove is answering in trust
  The water every minute,
Thinking so soft a murmur must
  Have her mate's cooing in it:
So softly doth earth's beauty round
Infuse itself in ocean's sound.

XVII

My sanguine soul bounds forwarder
  To meet the bounding waves;
Beside them straightway I repair,
  To live within the caves:
And near me two or three may dwell
Whom dreams fantastic please as well.

XVIII

Long winding caverns, glittering far
  Into a crystal distance!
Through clefts of which shall many a star
  Shine clear without resistance,
And carry down its rays the smell
Of flowers above invisible.

XIX

I said that two or three might choose
  Their dwelling near mine own:
Those who would change man's voice and use,
  For Nature's way and tone —
Man's veering heart and careless eyes,
For Nature's steadfast sympathies.

XX

Ourselves, to meet her faithfulness,
  Shall play a faithful part;
Her beautiful shall ne'er address
  The monstrous at our heart:
Her musical shall ever touch
Something within us also such.

XXI

Yet shall she not our mistress live,
  As doth the moon of ocean,
Though gently as the moon she give
  Our thoughts a light and motion:
More like a harp of many lays,
Moving its master while he plays.

XXII

No sod in all that island doth
  Yawn open for the dead;
No wind hath borne a traitor's oath;
  No earth, a mourner's tread;
We cannot say by stream or shade,
'I suffered *here*, — was *here* betrayed.'

XXIII

Our only 'farewell' we shall laugh
  To shifting cloud or hour,
And use our only epitaph
  To some bud turned a flower:
Our only tears shall serve to prove
Excess in pleasure or in love.

XXIV

Our fancies shall their plumage catch
  From fairest island-birds,
Whose eggs let young ones out at hatch,
  Born singing! then our words
Unconsciously shall take the dyes
Of those prodigious fantasies.

XXV

Yea, soon, no consonant unsmooth
  Our smile-tuned lips shall reach;
Sounds sweet as Hellas spake in youth
  Shall glide into our speech:
(What music, certes, can you find
As soft as voices which are kind?)

XXVI

And often, by the joy without
  And in us, overcome,
We, through our musing, shall let float
  Such poems, — sitting dumb, —
As Pindar might have writ if he
Had tended sheep in Arcady;

XXVII

Or Æschylus — the pleasant fields
He died in, longer knowing;
Or Homer, had men's sins and shields
Been lost in Meles flowing;
Or Poet Plato, had the undim
Unsetting Godlight broke on him.

XXVIII

Choose me the cave most worthy choice,
To make a place for prayer,
And I will choose a praying voice
To pour our spirits there:
How silverly the echoes run!
Thy will be done, — thy will be done.

XXIX

Gently yet strangely uttered words!
They lift me from my dream;
The island fadeth with its swards
That did no more than seem:
The streams are dry, no sun could find —
The fruits are fallen, without wind.

XXX

So oft the doing of God's will
Our foolish wills undoeth!
And yet what idle dream breaks ill,
Which morning-light subdueth?
And who would murmur and misdoubt,
When God's great sunrise finds him out?

THE DESERTED GARDEN

I MIND me in the days departed,
How often underneath the sun
With childish bounds I used to run
To a garden long deserted.

The beds and walks were vanished quite;
And wheresoe'er had struck the spade,
The greenest grasses Nature laid
To sanctify her right.

I called the place my wilderness,
For no one entered there but I;
The sheep looked in, the grass to espy,
And passed it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,
And spread their boughs enough about
To keep both sheep and shepherd out,
But not a happy child.

Adventurous joy it was for me!
I crept beneath the boughs, and found
A circle smooth of mossy ground
Beneath a poplar tree.

Old garden rose-trees hedged it in,
Bedropt with roses waxen-white
Well satisfied with dew and light
And careless to be seen.

Long years ago it might befall,
When all the garden flowers were trim,
The grave old gardener prided him
On these the most of all.

Some lady, stately overmuch,
Here moving with a silken noise,
Has blushed beside them at the voice
That likened her to such.

And these, to make a diadem,
She often may have plucked and twined,
Half-smiling as it came to mind
That few would look at *them.*

Oh, little thought that lady proud,
A child would watch her fair white rose,
When buried lay her whiter brows,
And silk was changed for shroud!

Nor thought that gardener, (full of scorns
For men unlearned and simple phrase,)
A child would bring it all its praise
By creeping through the thorns!

To me upon my low moss seat,
Though never a dream the roses sent
Of science or love's compliment,
I ween they smelt as sweet.

It did not move my grief to see
The trace of human step departed:
Because the garden was deserted,
The blither place for me!

Friends, blame me not! a narrow ken
Has childhood 'twixt the sun and sward;
We draw the moral afterward,
We feel the gladness then.

And gladdest hours for me did glide
In silence at the rose-tree wall:
A thrush made gladness musical
Upon the other side.

Nor he nor I did e'er incline
To peck or pluck the blossoms white;
How should I know but roses might
Lead lives as glad as mine?

To make my hermit-home complete,
I brought clear water from the spring
Praised in its own low murmuring,
And cresses glossy wet.

And so, I thought, my likeness grew
(Without the melancholy tale)
To 'gentle hermit of the dale,'
And Angelina too.

For oft I read within my nook
Such minstrel stories; till the breeze
Made sounds poetic in the trees,
And then I shut the book.

If I shut this wherein I write
I hear no more the wind athwart
Those trees, nor feel that childish heart
Delighting in delight.

My childhood from my life is parted,
My footstep from the moss which drew
Its fairy circle round: anew
The garden is deserted.

Another thrush may there rehearse
The madrigals which sweetest are;
No more for me! myself afar
Do sing a sadder verse.

Ah me, ah me! when erst I lay
In that child's-nest so greenly wrought,
I laughed unto myself and thought
'The time will pass away.'

And still I laughed, and did not fear
But that, whene'er was past away
The childish time, some happier play
My womanhood would cheer.

I knew the time would pass away,
And yet, beside the rose-tree wall,
Dear God, how seldom, if at all,
Did I look up to pray!

The time is past; and now that grows
The cypress high among the trees,
And I behold white sepulchres
As well as the white rose,—

When graver, meeker thoughts are given,
And I have learnt to lift my face,
Reminded how earth's greenest place
The color draws from heaven,—

It something saith for earthly pain,
But more for Heavenly promise free,
That I who was, would shrink to be
That happy child again.

THE SOUL'S TRAVELLING

'Ἤδη νοερούς
Πέτασαι ταρσούς.'—*Synesius.*

I

I DWELL amid the city ever.
The great humanity which beats
Its life along the stony streets,
Like a strong and unsunned river
In a self-made course,
I sit and hearken while it rolls.
Very sad and very hoarse
Certes is the flow of souls;
Infinitest tendencies
By the finite prest and pent,
In the finite, turbulent:
How we tremble in surprise
When sometimes, with an awful sound,
God's great plummet strikes the ground!

II

The champ of the steeds on the silver bit,
As they whirl the rich man's carriage by;
The beggar's whine as he looks at it,—
But it goes too fast for charity;
The trail on the street of the poor man's broom,
That the lady who walks to her palace-home,
On her silken skirt may catch no dust;
The tread of the business-men who must
Count their per-cents by the paces they take;
The cry of the babe unheard of its mother
Though it lie on her breast, while she thinks of her other
Laid yesterday where it will not wake;
The flower-girl's prayer to buy roses and pinks
Held out in the smoke, like stars by day;
The gin-door's oath that hollowly chinks
Guilt upon grief and wrong upon hate;

The cabman's cry to get out of the way;
The dustman's call down the area-grate;
The young maid's jest, and the old wife's scold,
The haggling talk of the boys at a stall,
The fight in the street which is backed for gold,
The plea of the lawyers in Westminster Hall;
The drop on the stones of the blind man's staff
As he trades in his own grief's sacredness,
The brothel shriek, and the Newgate laugh,
The hum upon 'Change, and the organ's grinding,
(The grinder's face being nevertheless
Dry and vacant of even woe
While the children's hearts are leaping so
At the merry music's winding;)
The black-plumed funeral's creeping train,
Long and slow (and yet they will go
As fast as Life though it hurry and strain !)
Creeping the populous houses through
And nodding their plumes at either side, —
At many a house, where an infant, new
To the sunshiny world, has just struggled and cried, —
At many a house where sitteth a bride
Trying to-morrow's coronals
With a scarlet blush to-day:
Slowly creep the funerals,
As none should hear the noise and say
'The living, the living must go away
To multiply the dead.'
Hark ! an upward shout is sent,
In grave strong joy from tower to steeple
The bells ring out,
The trumpets sound, the people shout,
The young queen goes to her Parliament.
She turneth round her large blue eyes
More bright with childish memories
Than royal hopes, upon the people;
On either side she bows her head
Lowly, with a queenly grace
And smile most trusting-innocent,
As if she smiled upon her mother;
The thousands press before each other
To bless her to her face;
And booms the deep majestic voice
Through trump and drum, — 'May the queen rejoice
In the people's liberties !'

III

I dwell amid the city,
And hear the flow of souls in act and speech,
For pomp or trade, for merrymake or folly:
I hear the confluence and sum of each,
And that is melancholy !
Thy voice is a complaint, O crownèd city,
The blue sky covering thee like God's great pity.

IV

O blue sky ! it mindeth me
Of places where I used to see
Its vast unbroken circle thrown
From the far pale-peakèd hill
Out to the last verge of ocean,
As by God's arm it were done
Then for the first time, with the emotion
Of that first impulse on it still.
Oh, we spirits fly at will
Faster than the wingèd steed
Whereof in old book we read,
With the sunlight foaming back
From his flanks to a misty wrack,
And his nostril reddening proud
As he breasteth the steep thunder-cloud, —
Smoother than Sabrina's chair
Gliding up from wave to air,
While she smileth debonair
Yet holy, coldly and yet brightly,
Like her own mooned waters nightly,
Through her dripping hair.

V

Very fast and smooth we fly,
Spirits, though the flesh be by;
All looks feed not from the eye
Nor all hearings from the ear:
We can hearken and espy
Without either, we can journey
Bold and gay as knight to tourney,
And, though we wear no visor down
To dark our countenance, the foe
Shall never chafe us as we go.

VI

I am gone from peopled town !
It passeth its street-thunder round
My body which yet hears no sound.
For now another sound, another
Vision, my soul's senses have —
O'er a hundred valleys deep
Where the hills' green shadows sleep

Scarce known because the valley-trees
Cross those upland images,
O'er a hundred hills each other
Watching to the western wave,
I have travelled, — I have found
The silent, lone, remembered ground.

VII

I have found a grassy niche
Hollowed in a seaside hill,
As if the ocean-grandeur which
Is aspectable from the place,
Had struck the hill as with a mace
Sudden and cleaving. You might fill
That little nook with the little cloud
Which sometimes lieth by the moon
To beautify a night of June;
A cavelike nook which, opening all
To the wide sea, is disallowed
From its own earth's sweet pastoral:
Cavelike, but roofless overhead
And made of verdant banks instead
Of any rocks, with flowerets spread
Instead of spar and stalactite,
Cowslips and daisies gold and white:
Such pretty flowers on such green sward,
You think the sea they look toward
Doth serve them for another sky
As warm and blue as that on high.

VIII

And in this hollow is a seat,
And when you shall have crept to it,
Slipping down the banks too steep
To be o'erbrowsèd by the sheep,
Do not think — though at your feet
The cliff's disrupt — you shall behold
The line where earth and ocean meet;
You sit too much above to view
The solemn confluence of the two:
You can hear them as they greet,
You can hear that evermore
Distance-softened noise more old
Than Nereid's singing, the tide spent
Joining soft issues with the shore
In harmony of discontent,
And when you hearken to the grave
Lamenting of the underwave,
You must believe in earth's communion
Albeit you witness not the union.

IX

Except that sound, the place is full
Of silences, which when you cull
By any word, it thrills you so
That presently you let them grow
To meditation's fullest length
Across your soul with a soul's strength:
And as they touch your soul, they borrow
Both of its grandeur and its sorrow,
That deathly odor which the clay
Leaves on its deathlessness alway.

X

Alway! alway? must this be?
Rapid Soul from city gone,
Dost thou carry inwardly
What doth make the city's moan?
Must this deep sigh of thine own
Haunt thee with humanity?
Green visioned banks that are too steep
To be o'erbrowsèd by the sheep,
May all sad thoughts adown you creep
Without a shepherd? Mighty sea,
Can we dwarf thy magnitude
And fit it to our straitest mood?
O fair, fair Nature, are we thus
Impotent and querulous
Among thy workings glorious,
Wealth and sanctities, that still
Leave us vacant and defiled
And wailing like a soft-kissed child,
Kissed soft against his will?

XI

God, God!
With a child's voice I cry,
Weak, sad, confidingly —
God, God!
Thou knowest, eyelids, raised not always up
Unto thy love, (as none of ours are) droop
As ours, o'er many a tear;
Thou knowest, though thy universe is broad,
Two little tears suffice to cover all:
Thou knowest, Thou who art so prodigal
Of beauty, we are oft but stricken deer
Expiring in the woods, that care for none
Of those delightsome flowers they die upon.

XII

O blissful Mouth which breathed the mournful breath
We name our souls, self-spoilt! — by that strong passion
Which paled Thee once with sighs, by that strong death

Which made Thee once unbreathing — from the wrack
Themselves have called around them, call them back,
Back to Thee in continuous aspiration!
For here, O Lord,
For here they travel vainly, vainly pass
From city-pavement to untrodden sward
Where the lark finds her deep nest in the grass
Cold with the earth's last dew. Yea, very vain
The greatest speed of all these souls of men
Unless they travel upward to the throne
Where sittest Thou the satisfying One,
With help for sins and holy perfectings
For all requirements: while the archangel, raising
Unto thy face his full ecstatic gazing,
Forgets the rush and rapture of his wings.

SOUNDS

'Ἤκουσας ἢ οὐκ ἤκουσας.' — *Æschylus.*

I

Hearken, hearken!
The rapid river carrieth
Many noises underneath
The hoary ocean:
Teaching his solemnity
Sounds of inland life and glee
Learnt beside the waving tree
When the winds in summer prank
Toss the shades from bank to bank,
And the quick rains, in emotion
Which rather gladdens earth than grieves,
Count and visibly rehearse
The pulses of the universe
Upon the summer leaves —
Learnt among the lilies straight
When they bow them to the weight
Of many bees whose hidden hum
Seemeth from themselves to come —
Learnt among the grasses green
Where the rustling mice are seen
By the gleaming, as they run,
Of their quick eyes in the sun;
And lazy sheep are browsing through
With their noses trailed in dew;
And the squirrel leaps adown
Holding fast the filbert brown;
And the lark, with more of mirth
In his song than suits the earth,
Droppeth some in soaring high,
To pour the rest out in the sky;
While the woodland doves apart
In the copse's leafy heart,
Solitary, not ascetic,
Hidden and yet vocal, seem
Joining, in a lovely psalm,
Man's despondence, nature's calm,
Half mystical and half pathetic,
Like a singing in a dream.
All these sounds the river telleth,
Softened to an undertone
Which ever and anon he swelleth
By a burden of his own,
In the ocean's ear:
Ay, and ocean seems to hear
With an inward gentle scorn,
Smiling to his caverns worn.

II

Hearken, hearken!
The child is shouting at his play
Just in the tramping funeral's way;
The widow moans as she turns aside
To shun the face of the blushing bride
While, shaking the tower of the ancient church,
The marriage bells do swing;
And in the shadow of the porch
An idiot sits with his lean hands full
Of hedgerow flowers and a poet's skull,
Laughing loud and gibbering
Because it is so brown a thing,
While he sticketh the gaudy poppies red
In and out the senseless head
Where all sweet fancies grew instead:
And you may hear at the self-same time
Another poet who reads his rhyme,
Low as a brook in summer air,
Save when he droppeth his voice adown
To dream of the amaranthine crown
His mortal brows shall wear:
And a baby cries with a feeble sound
'Neath the weary weight of the life new-found,
And an old man groans, — with his testament
Only half-signed, — for the life that 's spent;
And lovers twain do softly say,
As they sit on a grave, 'For aye, for aye!'
And foemen twain, while Earth their mother
Looks greenly upward, curse each other;
A school-boy drones his task, with looks
Cast over the page to the elm-tree rooks:
A lonely student cries aloud

Eureka! clasping at his shroud;
A beldame's age-cracked voice doth sing
To a little infant slumbering;
A maid forgotten weeps alone,
Muffling her sobs on the trysting-stone;
A sick man wakes at his own mouth's wail,
A gossip coughs in her thrice-told tale,
A muttering gamester shakes the dice,
A reaper foretells goodluck from the skies,
A monarch vows as he lifts his hand to them;
A patriot, leaving his native land to them,
Cries to the world against perjured state;
A priest disserts
Upon linen skirts,
A sinner screams for one hope more,
A dancer's feet do palpitate
A piper's music out on the floor;
And nigh to the awful Dead, the living
Low speech and stealthy steps are giving,
Because he cannot hear;
And *he* who on that narrow bier
Has room enough, is closely wound
In a silence piercing more than sound.

III

Hearken, hearken!
God speaketh to thy soul,
Using the sùpreme voice which doth confound
All life with consciousness of Deity,
All senses into one, —
As the seer-saint of Patmos, loving John
(For whom did backward roll
The cloud-gate of the future) turned to *see*
The Voice which spake. It speaketh now,
Through the regular breath of the calm creation,
Through the moan of the creature's desolation
Striking, and in its stroke resembling
The memory of a solemn vow
Which pierceth the din of a festival
To one in the midst, — and he letteth fall
The cup with a sudden trembling.

IV

Hearken, hearken!
God speaketh in thy soul,
Saying, 'O thou that movest
With feeble steps across this earth of Mine,
To break beside the fount thy golden bowl
And spill its purple wine, —
Look up to heaven and see how, like a scroll,
My right hand hath thine immortality
In an eternal grasping! thou, that lovest
The songful birds and grasses underfoot,
And also what change mars and tombs pollute —
I am the end of love! give love to *Me!*
O thou that sinnest, grace doth more abound
Than all thy sin! sit still beneath My rood,
And count the droppings of My victim-blood,
And seek none other sound!'

V

Hearken, hearken!
Shall we hear the lapsing river
And our brother's sighing ever,
And not the voice of God?

NIGHT AND THE MERRY MAN

NIGHT

'Neath my moon what doest thou,
With a somewhat paler brow
Than she giveth to the ocean?
He, without a pulse or motion,
Muttering low before her stands,
Lifting his invoking hands
Like a seer before a sprite,
To catch her oracles of light:
But thy soul out-trembles now
Many pulses on thy brow.
Where be all thy laughters clear,
Others laughed alone to hear?
Where thy quaint jests, said for fame?
Where thy dances, mixed with game?
Where thy festive companies,
Moonèd o'er with ladies' eyes
All more bright for thee, I trow?
'Neath my moon what doest thou?

THE MERRY MAN

I am digging my warm heart
Till I find its coldest part;
I am digging wide and low,
Further than a spade will go,
Till that, when the pit is deep
And large enough, I there may heap
All my present pain and past
Joy, dead things that look aghast
By the daylight: now 't is done.
Throw them in, by one and one!
I must laugh, at rising sun.

Memories — of fancy's golden
Treasures which my hands have holden,
Till the chillness made them ache;
Of childhood's hopes that used to wake
If birds were in a singing strain,
And for less cause, sleep again;
Of the moss-seat in the wood
Where I trysted solitude;
Of the hill-top where the wind
Used to follow me behind,
Then in sudden rush to blind
Both my glad eyes with my hair,
Taken gladly in the snare;
Of the climbing up the rocks,
Of the playing 'neath the oaks
Which retain beneath them now
Only shadow of the bough;
Of the lying on the grass
While the clouds did overpass,
Only they, so lightly driven,
Seeming betwixt me and Heaven;
Of the little prayers serene,
Murmuring of earth and sin;
Of large-leaved philosophy
Leaning from my childish knee;
Of poetic book sublime,
Soul-kissed for the first dear time,
Greek or English, ere I knew
Life was not a poem too: —
Throw them in, by one and one!
I must laugh, at rising sun.

— Of the glorious ambitions
Yet unquenched by their fruitions;
Of the reading out the nights;
Of the straining at mad heights;
Of achievements, less descried
By a dear few than magnified;
Of praises from the many earned
When praise from love was undiscerned;
Of the sweet reflecting gladness
Softened by itself to sadness: —
Throw them in, by one and one!
I must laugh, at rising sun.

What are these? more, more than these!
Throw in dearer memories! —
Of voices whereof but to speak
Makes mine own all sunk and weak;
Of smiles the thought of which is sweeping
All my soul to floods of weeping;
Of looks whose absence fain would weigh
My looks to the ground for aye;
Of clasping hands — ah me, I wring
Mine, and in a tremble fling
Downward, downward all this paining!
Partings with the sting remaining,
Meetings with a deeper throe
Since the joy is ruined so,
Changes with a fiery burning,
(Shadows upon all the turning,)
Thoughts of . . . with a storm they came,
Them I have not breath to name:
Downward, downward be they cast
In the pit! and now at last
My work beneath the moon is done,
And I shall laugh, at rising sun.

But let me pause or ere I cover
All my treasures darkly over:
I will speak not in thine ears,
Only tell my beaded tears
Silently, most silently.
When the last is calmly told,
Let that same moist rosary
With the rest sepùlchred be,
Finished now! The darksome mould
Sealeth up the darksome pit.
I will lay no stone on it,
Grasses I will sow instead,
Fit for Queen Titania's tread;
Flowers, encolored with the sun,
And *ai ai* written upon none;
Thus, whenever saileth by
The Lady World of dainty eye,
Not a grief shall here remain,
Silken shoon to damp or stain:
And while she lisps, 'I have not seen
Any place more smooth and clean' . . .
Here she cometh! — Ha, ha! — who
Laughs as loud as I can do?

EARTH AND HER PRAISERS

I

The Earth is old;
Six thousand winters make her heart a-cold;
The sceptre slanteth from her palsied hold.
She saith, ''Las me! God's word that I was "good"
Is taken back to heaven,
From whence when any sound comes, I am riven
By some sharp bolt; and now no angel would
Descend with sweet dew-silence on my mountains,

To glorify the lovely river fountains
That gush along their side:
I see — O weary change ! — I see instead
This human wrath and pride,
These thrones and tombs, judicial wrong and blood,
And bitter words are poured upon mine head —
"O Earth ! thou art a stage for tricks unholy,
A church for most remorseful melancholy;
Thou art so spoilt, we should forget we had
An Eden in thee, wert thou not so sad !"
Sweet children, I am old ! ye, every one,
Do keep me from a portion of my sun.
Give praise in change for brightness !
That I may shake my hills in infiniteness
Of breezy laughter, as in youthful mirth,
To hear Earth's sons and daughters praising Earth.'

II

Whereupon a child began
With spirit running up to man
As by angels' shining ladder,
(May he find no cloud above !)
Seeming he had ne'er been sadder
All his days than now,
Sitting in the chestnut grove,
With that joyous overflow
Of smiling from his mouth o'er brow
And cheek and chin, as if the breeze
Leaning tricksy from the trees
To part his golden hairs, had blown
Into an hundred smiles that one.

III

'O rare, rare Earth !' he saith,
'I will praise thee presently;
Not to-day; I have no breath:
I have hunted squirrels three —
Two ran down in the furzy hollow
Where I could not see nor follow,
One sits at the top of the filbert-tree,
With a yellow nut and a mock at me:
Presently it shall be done !
When I see which way these two have run,
When the mocking one at the filbert-top
Shall leap adown and beside me stop,
Then, rare Earth, rare Earth,
Will I pause, having known thy worth,
To say all good of thee !'

IV

Next a lover, — with a dream
'Neath his waking eyelids hidden,
And a frequent sigh unbidden,
And an idlesse all the day
Beside a wandering stream,
And a silence that is made
Of a word he dares not say, —
Shakes slow his pensive head:
'Earth, Earth !' saith he,
'If spirits, like thy roses, grew
On one stalk, and winds austere
Could but only blow them near,
To share each other's dew; —
If, when summer rains agree
To beautify thy hills, I knew
Looking off them I might see
Some one very beauteous too, —
Then Earth,' saith he,
'I would praise . . . nay, nay — not *thee !*'

V

Will the pedant name her next ?
Crabbèd with a crabbèd text
Sits he in his study nook,
With his elbow on a book,
And with stately crossèd knees,
And a wrinkle deeply thrid
Through his lowering brow,
Caused by making proofs enow
That Plato in 'Parmenides'
Meant the same Spinoza did, —
Or, that an hundred of the groping
Like himself, had made one Homer,
Homeros being a misnomer.
What hath *he* to do with praise
Of Earth or aught ? Whene'er the sloping
Sunbeams through his window daze
His eyes off from the learnèd phrase,
Straightway he draws close the curtain.
May abstraction keep him dumb !
Were his lips to ope, 't is certain
'*Derivatum est*' would come.

VI

Then a mourner moveth pale
In a silence full of wail,
Raising not his sunken head
Because he wandered last that way
With that one beneath the clay:
Weeping not, because that one,
The only one who would have said

'Cease to weep, beloved!' has gone
Whence returneth comfort none.
The silence breaketh suddenly,—
'Earth, I praise thee!' crieth he,
'Thou hast a grave for also *me*.'

VII

Ha, a poet! know him by
The ecstasy-dilated eye,
Not uncharged with tears that ran
Upward from his heart of man;
By the cheek, from hour to hour,
Kindled bright or sunken wan
With a sense of lonely power;
By the brow uplifted higher
Than others, for more low declining:
By the lip which words of fire
Overboiling have burned white
While they gave the nations light:
Ay, in every time and place
Ye may know the poet's face
  By the shade or shining.

VIII

'Neath a golden cloud he stands,
Spreading his impassioned hands.
'O God's Earth!' he saith, 'the sign
From the Father-soul to mine
Of all beauteous mysteries,
Of all perfect images
Which, divine in his divine,
In my human only are
Very excellent and fair!
Think not, Earth, that I would raise
Weary forehead in thy praise,
(Weary, that I cannot go
Farther from thy region low,)
If were struck no richer meanings
From thee than thyself. The leanings
Of the close trees o'er the brim
Of a sunshine-haunted stream
Have a sound beneath their leaves,
  Not of wind, not of wind,
Which the poet's voice achieves:
The faint mountains, heaped behind,
Have a falling on their tops,
  Not of dew, not of dew,
Which the poet's fancy drops:
Viewless things his eyes can view,
Driftings of his dream do light
All the skies by day and night,
And the seas that deepest roll
Carry murmurs of his soul.
Earth, I praise thee! praise thou *me!*
God perfecteth his creation
With this recipient poet-passion,
And makes the beautiful to be.
I praise thee, O belovèd sign,
From the God-soul unto mine!
Praise me, that I cast on thee
The cunning sweet interpretation,
The help and glory and dilation
  Of mine immortality!'

IX

There was silence. None did dare
To use again the spoken air
Of that far-charming voice, until
A Christian resting on the hill,
With a thoughtful smile subdued
(Seeming learnt in solitude)
Which a weeper might have viewed
Without new tears, did softly say,
And looked up unto heaven alway
While he praised the Earth—
                    'O Earth,
I count the praises thou art worth,
By thy waves that move aloud,
By thy hills against the cloud,
By thy valleys warm and green,
By the copses' elms between,
By their birds which, like a sprite
Scattered by a strong delight
Into fragments musical,
Stir and sing in every bush;
By thy silver founts that fall,
As if to entice the stars at night
To thine heart; by grass and rush,
And little weeds the children pull,
Mistook for flowers!
                —Oh, beautiful
Art thou, Earth, albeit worse
Than in heaven is callèd good!
Good to us, that we may know
Meekly from thy good to go;
While the holy, crying Blood
Puts its music kind and low
'Twixt such ears as are not dull,
  And thine ancient curse!

X

'Praisèd be the mosses soft
In thy forest pathways oft,
And the thorns, which make us think
Of the thornless river-brink
  Where the ransomed tread:
Praisèd be thy sunny gleams,
And the storm, that worketh dreams
  Of calm unfinishèd:
Praisèd be thine active days,

And thy night-time's solemn need,
When in God's dear book we read
No night shall be therein:
Praisèd be thy dwellings warm
By household fagot's cheerful blaze,
Where, to hear of pardoned sin,
Pauseth oft the merry din,
Save the babe's upon the arm
Who croweth to the crackling wood:
Yea, and, better understood,
Praisèd be thy dwellings cold,
Hid beneath the churchyard mould,
Where the bodies of the saints
Separate from earthly taints
Lie asleep, in blessing bound,
Waiting for the trumpet's sound
To free them into blessing; — none
Weeping more beneath the sun,
Though dangerous words of human love
Be graven very near, above.

XI

'Earth, we Christians praise thee thus,
Even for the change that comes
With a grief from thee to us:
For thy cradles and thy tombs,
For the pleasant corn and wine
And summer-heat; and also for
The frost upon the sycamore
And hail upon the vine!'

THE VIRGIN MARY TO THE CHILD JESUS

> 'But see the Virgin blest
> Hath laid her babe to rest.'
> — MILTON'S *Hymn on the Nativity.*

I

SLEEP, sleep, mine Holy One!
My flesh, my Lord! — what name? I do not know
A name that seemeth not too high or low,
Too far from me or heaven:
My Jesus, *that* is best! that word being given
By the majestic angel whose command
Was softly as a man's beseeching said,
When I and all the earth appeared to stand
In the great overflow
Of light celestial from his wings and head.
Sleep, sleep, my saving One!

II

And art Thou come for saving, baby-browed
And speechless Being — art Thou come for saving?
The palm that grows beside our door is bowed
By treadings of the low wind from the south,
A restless shadow through the chamber waving:
Upon its bough a bird sings in the sun,
But Thou, with that close slumber on thy mouth,
Dost seem of wind and sun already weary.
Art come for saving, O my weary One?

III

Perchance this sleep that shutteth out the dreary
Earth-sounds and motions, opens on thy soul
High dreams on fire with God;
High songs that make the pathways where they roll
More bright than stars do theirs; and visions new
Of thine eternal Nature's old abode.
Suffer this mother's kiss,
Best thing that earthly is,
To glide the music and the glory through,
Nor narrow in thy dream the broad upliftings
Of any seraph wing.
Thus noiseless, thus. Sleep, sleep, my dreaming One!

IV

The slumber of his lips meseems to run
Through *my* lips to mine heart, to all its shiftings
Of sensual life, bringing contrariousness
In a great calm. I feel I could lie down
As Moses did, and die, — and then live most.
I am 'ware of you, heavenly Presences,
That stand with your peculiar light unlost,
Each forehead with a high thought for a crown,
Unsunned i' the sunshine! I am 'ware. Ye throw
No shade against the wall! How motionless
Ye round me with your living statuary,

While through your whiteness, in and outwardly,
Continual thoughts of God appear to go,
Like light's soul in itself. I bear, I bear
To look upon the dropt lids of your eyes,
Though their external shining testifies
To that beatitude within which were
Enough to blast an eagle at his sun:
I fall not on my sad clay face before ye, —
I look on his. I know
My spirit which dilateth with the woe
Of his mortality,
May well contain your glory.
Yea, drop your lids more low.
Ye are but fellow-worshippers with me!
Sleep, sleep, my worshipped One!

V

We sate among the stalls at Bethlehem;
The dumb kine from their fodder turning them,
Softened their hornèd faces
To almost human gazes
Toward the newly Born:
The simple shepherds from the star-lit brooks
Brought visionary looks,
As yet in their astonied hearing rung
The strange sweet angel-tongue:
The magi of the East, in sandals worn,
Knelt reverent, sweeping round,
With long pale beards, their gifts upon the ground,
The incense, myrrh and gold
These baby hands were impotent to hold:
So let all earthlies and celestials wait
Upon thy royal state.
Sleep, sleep, my kingly One!

VI

I am not proud — meek angels, ye invest
New meeknesses to hear such utterance rest
On mortal lips, — 'I am not proud' — *not proud!*
Albeit in my flesh God sent his Son,
Albeit over Him my head is bowed
As others bow before Him, still mine heart
Bows lower than their knees. O centuries
That roll in vision your futurities
My future grave athwart, —
Whose murmurs seem to reach me while I keep
Watch o'er this sleep, —
Say of me as the Heavenly said — 'Thou art
The blessedest of women!' — blessedest,
Not holiest, not noblest, no high name
Whose height misplaced may pierce me like a shame
When I sit meek in heaven!
For me, for me,
God knows that I am feeble like the rest!
I often wandered forth, more child than maiden
Among the midnight hills of Galilee
Whose summits looked heaven-laden,
Listening to silence as it seemed to be
God's voice, so soft yet strong, so fain to press
Upon my heart as heaven did on the height,
And waken up its shadows by a light,
And show its vileness by a holiness.
Then I knelt down most silent like the night,
Too self-renounced for fears,
Raising my small face to the boundless blue
Whose stars did mix and tremble in my tears:
God heard *them* falling after, with his dew.

VII

So, seeing my corruption, can I see
This Incorruptible now born of me,
This fair new Innocence no sun did chance
To shine on, (for even Adam was no child,)
Created from my nature all defiled,
This mystery, from out mine ignorance, —
Nor feel the blindness, stain corruption more
Than others do, or *I* did heretofore?
Can hands wherein such burden pure has been,
Not open with the cry 'unclean, unclean,'
More oft than any else beneath the skies?
Ah King, ah Christ, ah son!
The kine, the shepherds, the abasèd wise
Must all less lowly wait
Than I, upon thy state.
Sleep, sleep, my kingly One!

VIII

Art Thou a King, then? Come, his universe,
Come, crown me Him a King!
Pluck rays from all such stars as never fling

Their light where fell a curse,
And make a crowning for this kingly brow!—
What is my word? Each empyreal star
Sits in a sphere afar
In shining ambuscade:
The child-brow, crowned by none,
Keeps its unchildlike shade.
Sleep, sleep, my crownless One!

IX

Unchildlike shade! No other babe doth wear
An aspect very sorrowful, as Thou.
No small babe-smiles my watching heart has seen
To float like speech the speechless lips between,
No dovelike cooing in the golden air,
No quick short joys of leaping babyhood.
Alas, our earthly good
In heaven thought evil, seems too good for Thee:
Yet, sleep, my weary One!

X

And then the drear sharp tongue of prophecy,
With the dread sense of things which shall be done,
Doth smite me inly, like a sword: a sword?
That 'smites the Shepherd.' Then, I think aloud
The words 'despised,'—'rejected,'—every word
Recoiling into darkness as I view
The Darling on my knee.
Bright angels,—move not—lest ye stir the cloud
Betwixt my soul and his futurity!
I must not die, with mother's work to do,
And could not live—and see.

XI

It is enough to bear
This image still and fair,
This holier in sleep
Than a saint at prayer,
This aspect of a child
Who never sinned or smiled;
This Presence in an infant's face;
This sadness most like love,
This love than love more deep,
This weakness like omnipotence
It is so strong to move.
Awful is this watching place,
Awful what I see from hence—
A king, without regalia,
A God, without the thunder,
A child, without the heart for play;
Ay, a Creator, rent asunder
From his first glory and cast away
On his own world, for me alone
To hold in hands created, crying—Son!

XII

That tear fell not on Thee,
Beloved, yet thou stirrest in thy slumber!
Thou, stirring not for glad sounds out of number
Which through the vibratory palm-trees run
From summer-wind and bird,
So quickly hast thou heard
A tear fall silently?
Wak'st thou, O loving One?—

TO BETTINE

THE CHILD-FRIEND OF GOETHE

'I have the second sight, Goethe!'
—*Letters of a Child.*

I

Bettine, friend of Goethe,
Hadst thou the second sight—
Upturning worship and delight
With such a loving duty
To his grand face, as women will,
The childhood 'neath thine eyelids still?

II

—Before his shrine to doom thee,
Using the same child's smile
That heaven and earth, beheld erewhile
For the first time, won from thee
Ere star and flower grew dim and dead
Save at his feet and o'er his head?

III

—Digging thine heart and throwing
Away its childhood's gold,
That so its woman-depth might hold
His spirit's overflowing?
(For surging souls, no worlds can bound,
Their channel in the heart have found.)

IV

O child, to change appointed,
Thou hadst not second sight!

What eyes the future view aright
  Unless by tears anointed ?
Yea, only tears themselves can show
The burning ones that have to flow.

V

  O woman, deeply loving,
Thou hadst not second sight !
The star is very high and bright,
  And none can see it moving.
Love looks around, below, above,
Yet all his prophecy is — love.

VI

  The bird thy childhood's playing
Sent onward o'er the sea,
Thy dove of hope came back to thee
  Without a leaf: art laying
Its wet cold wing no sun can dry,
Still in thy bosom secretly ?

VII

  Our Goethe's friend, Bettine,
I have the second sight !
The stone upon his grave is white,
  The funeral stone between ye;
And in thy mirror thou hast viewed
Some change as hardly understood.

VIII

  Where 's childhood ? where is Goethe ?
The tears are in thine eyes.
Nay, thou shalt yet reorganize
  Thy maidenhood of beauty
In his own glory, which is smooth
Of wrinkles and sublime in youth.

IX

  The poet's arms have wound thee,
He breathes upon thy brow,
He lifts thee upward in the glow
  Of his great genius round thee, —
The childlike poet undefiled
Preserving evermore THE CHILD.

FELICIA HEMANS

TO L. E. L.

REFERRING TO HER MONODY ON THE POETESS

First published with the title 'Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans.'

I

THOU bay-crowned living One that o'er the bay-crowned Dead art bowing,
And o'er the shadeless moveless brow the vital shadow throwing,
And o'er the sighless songless lips the wail and music wedding,
And dropping o'er the tranquil eyes the tears not of their shedding ! —

II

Take music from the silent Dead whose meaning is completer,
Reserve thy tears for living brows where all such tears are meeter,
And leave the violets in the grass to brighten where thou treadest,
No flowers for her ! no need of flowers, albeit 'bring flowers !' thou saidest.

III

Yes, flowers, to crown the 'cup and lute,' since both may come to breaking,
Or flowers, to greet the 'bride' — the heart's own beating works its aching;
Or flowers, to soothe the 'captive's' sight, from earth's free bosom gathered,
Reminding of his earthly hope, then withering as it withered:

IV

But bring not near the solemn corse a type of human seeming,
Lay only dust's stern verity upon the dust undreaming:
And while the calm perpetual stars shall look upon it solely,
Her spherèd soul shall look on *them* with eyes more bright and holy.

V

Nor mourn, O living One, because her part in life was mourning:
Would she have lost the poet's fire for anguish of the burning ?
The minstrel harp, for the strained string ? the tripod, for the afflated
Woe ? or the vision, for those tears in which it shone dilated ?

VI

Perhaps she shuddered while the world's cold hand her brow was wreathing,
But never wronged that mystic breath which breathed in all her breathing,

Which drew, from rocky earth and man, abstractions high and moving,
Beauty, if not the beautiful, and love, if not the loving.

VII

Such visionings have paled in sight; the Saviour she descrieth,
And little recks *who* wreathed the brow which on his bosom lieth:
The whiteness of his innocence o'er all her garments, flowing,
There learneth she the sweet 'new song' she will not mourn in knowing.

VIII

Be happy, crowned and living One! and as thy dust decayeth
May thine own England say for thee what now for Her it sayeth —
'Albeit softly in our ears her silver song was ringing,
The foot-fall of her parting soul is softer than her singing.'

MEMORY AND HOPE

I

Back-looking Memory
And prophet Hope both sprang from out the ground;
One, where the flashing of cherubic sword
Fell sad in Eden's ward,
And one, from Eden earth within the sound
Of the four rivers lapsing pleasantly,
What time the promise after curse was said,
'Thy seed shall bruise his head.'

II

Poor Memory's brain is wild,
As moonstruck by that flaming atmosphere
When she was born; her deep eyes shine and shone
With light that conquereth sun
And stars to wanner paleness year by year:
With odorous gums she mixeth things defiled,
She trampleth down earth's grasses green and sweet
With her far-wandering feet.

III

She plucketh many flowers,
Their beauty on her bosom's coldness killing;
She teacheth every melancholy sound
To winds and waters round;
She droppeth tears with seed where man is tilling
The rugged soil in his exhausted hours;
She smileth — ah me! in her smile doth go
A mood of deeper woe.

IV

Hope tripped on out of sight,
Crowned with an Eden wreath she saw not wither,
And went a-nodding through the wilderness
With brow that shone no less
Than a sea-gull's wing, brought nearer by rough weather,
Searching the treeless rock for fruits of light;
Her fair quick feet being armed from stones and cold
By slippers of pure gold.

V

Memory did Hope much wrong
And, while she dreamed, her slippers stole away;
But still she wended on with mirth unheeding,
Although her feet were bleeding,
Till Memory tracked her on a certain day,
And with most evil eyes did search her long
And cruelly, whereat she sank to ground
In a stark deadly swound.

VI

And so my Hope were slain,
Had it not been that Thou wast standing near —
Oh Thou who saidest 'Live,' to creatures lying
In their own blood and dying!
For Thou her forehead to thine heart didst rear,
And make its silent pulses sing again,
Pouring a new light o'er her darkened eyne
With tender tears from thine.

VII

Therefore my Hope arose
From out her swound and gazed upon thy face,
And, meeting there that soft subduing look
Which Peter's spirit shook,
Sank downward in a rapture to embrace
Thy piercèd hands and feet with kisses close,
And prayed Thee to assist her evermore
To 'reach the things before.'

THE SLEEP

'He giveth His beloved sleep.'
—*Psalm* cxxvii. 2.

I

Of all the thoughts of God that are
Borne inward into souls afar,
Along the Psalmist's music deep,
Now tell me if that any is,
For gift or grace, surpassing this:
'He giveth his belovèd — sleep?'

II

What would we give to our beloved?
The hero's heart to be unmoved,
The poet's star-tuned harp to sweep,
The patriot's voice to teach and rouse,
The monarch's crown to light the brows?
He giveth his belovèd — sleep.

III

What do we give to our beloved?
A little faith all undisproved,
A little dust to overweep,
And bitter memories to make
The whole earth blasted for our sake:
He giveth his belovèd — sleep.

IV

'Sleep soft,' beloved! we sometimes say,
Who have no tune to charm away
Sad dreams that through the eyelids creep:
But never doleful dream again
Shall break the happy slumber when
He giveth his belovèd — sleep.

V

O earth, so full of dreary noises!
O men, with wailing in your voices!
O delvèd gold, the wailers heap!
O strife, O curse, that o'er it fall!
God strikes a silence through you all,
And giveth his belovèd — sleep.

VI

His dews drop mutely on the hill,
His cloud above it saileth still,
Though on its slope men sow and reap:
More softly than the dew is shed,
Or cloud is floated overhead,
He giveth his belovèd — sleep.

VII

Ay, men may wonder while they scan
A living, thinking, feeling man
Confirmed in such a rest to keep;
But angels say, and through the word
I think their happy smile is *heard* —
'He giveth his belovèd — sleep.'

VIII

For me, my heart that erst did go
Most like a tired child at a show,
That sees through tears the mummers leap,
Would now its wearied vision close,
Would childlike on his love repose
Who giveth his belovèd — sleep.

IX

And friends, dear friends, when it shall be
That this low breath is gone from me,
And round my bier ye come to weep,
Let One, most loving of you all,
Say 'Not a tear must o'er her fall!
'He giveth his belovèd sleep.'

MAN AND NATURE

A sad man on a summer day
Did look upon the earth and say —

'Purple cloud the hill-top binding;
Folded hills the valleys wind in;
Valleys with fresh streams among you;
Streams with bosky trees along you;
Trees with many birds and blossoms;
Birds with music-trembling bosoms;
Blossoms dropping dews that wreathe you
To your fellow flowers beneath you;
Flowers that constellate on earth;
Earth that shakest to the mirth

Of the merry Titan Ocean,
All his shining hair in motion!
Why am I thus the only one
Who can be dark beneath the sun?'

But when the summer day was past,
He looked to heaven and smiled at last,
Self-answered so —
'Because, O cloud,
Pressing with thy crumpled shroud
Heavily on mountain top, —
Hills that almost seem to drop
Stricken with a misty death
To the valleys underneath, —
Valleys sighing with the torrent, —
Waters streaked with branches horrent, —
Branchless trees that shake your head
Wildly o'er your blossoms spread
Where the common flowers are found, —
Flowers with foreheads to the ground, —
Ground that shriekest while the sea
With his iron smiteth thee —
I am, besides, the only one
Who can be bright *without* the sun.'

A SEA-SIDE WALK

I

We walked beside the sea
After a day which perished silently
Of its own glory — like the princess weird
Who, combating the Genius, scorched and seared,
Uttered with burning breath, 'Ho! victory!'
And sank adown, a heap of ashes pale:
So runs the Arab tale.

II

The sky above us showed
A universal and unmoving cloud
On which the cliffs permitted us to see
Only the outline of their majesty,
As master-minds when gazed at by the crowd:
And shining with a gloom, the water gray
Swang in its moon-taught way.

III

Nor moon, nor stars were out;
They did not dare to tread so soon about,
Though trembling, in the footsteps of the sun:
The light was neither night's nor day's, but one
Which, life-like, had a beauty in its doubt.
And silence's impassioned breathings round
Seemed wandering into sound.

IV

O solemn-beating heart
Of nature! I have knowledge that thou art
Bound unto man's by cords he cannot sever;
And, what time they are slackened by him ever,
So to attest his own supernal part,
Still runneth thy vibration fast and strong
The slackened cord along:

V

For though we never spoke
Of the gray water and the shaded rock,
Dark wave and stone unconsciously were fused
Into the plaintive speaking that we used
Of absent friends and memories unforsook;
And, had we seen each other's face, we had
Seen haply each was sad.

THE SEA-MEW

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO M. E. H

I

How joyously the young sea-mew
Lay dreaming on the waters blue
Whereon our little bark had thrown
A little shade, the only one,
But shadows ever man pursue.

II

Familiar with the waves and free
As if their own white foam were he,
His heart upon the heart of ocean
Lay learning all its mystic motion,
And throbbing to the throbbing sea.

III

And such a brightness in his eye
As if the ocean and the sky
Within him had lit up and nurst
A soul God gave him not at first,
To comprehend their majesty.

IV

We were not cruel, yet did sunder
His white wing from the blue waves under,
And bound it, while his fearless eyes
Shone up to ours in calm surprise,
As deeming us some ocean wonder.

V

We bore our ocean bird unto
A grassy place where he might view
The flowers that curtsey to the bees,
The waving of the tall green trees,
The falling of the silver dew.

VI

But flowers of earth were pale to him
Who had seen the rainbow fishes swim;
And when earth's dew around him lay
He thought of ocean's wingèd spray,
And his eye waxèd sad and dim.

VII

The green trees round him only made
A prison with their darksome shade;
And drooped his wing, and mournèd he
For his own boundless glittering sea —
Albeit he knew not they could fade.

VIII

Then One her gladsome face did bring,
Her gentle voice's murmuring,
In ocean's stead his heart to move
And teach him what was human love:
He thought it a strange, mournful thing.

IX

He lay down in his grief to die,
(First looking to the sea-like sky
That hath no waves) because, alas!
Our human touch did on him pass,
And, with our touch, our agony.

THE LITTLE FRIEND

WRITTEN IN THE BOOK WHICH SHE MADE AND SENT TO ME

‘— το ὁ ηδη εξ οφθαλμων απεληλυθεν.’
— *Marcus Antoninus.*

I

The book thou givest, dear as such,
  Shall bear thy dearer name;
And many a word the leaves shall touch,
  For thee who form'dst the same!
And on them, many a thought shall grow
  'Neath memory's rain and sun,
Of thee, glad child, who dost not know
  That thought and pain are one!

II

Yes! thoughts of thee, who satest oft,
  A while since, at my side —
So wild to tame, — to move so soft,
  So very hard to chide:
The childish vision at thine heart,
  The lesson on the knee;
The wandering looks which *would* depart,
  Like gulls, across the sea!

III

The laughter, which no half-belief
  In wrath could all suppress:
The falling tears, which looked like grief,
  And were but gentleness:
The fancies sent, for bliss, abroad,
  As Eden's were not done —
Mistaking still the cherub's sword
  For shining of the sun!

IV

The sportive speech with wisdom in 't —
  The question strange and bold —
The childish fingers in the print
  Of God's creative hold:
The praying words in whispers said,
  The sin with sobs confest;
The leaning of the young meek head
  Upon the Saviour's breast!

V

The gentle consciousness of praise,
  With hues that went and came;
The brighter blush, a word could raise,
  Were *that* — a father's name!
The shadow on thy smile for each
  That on his face could fall!
So quick hath love been, *thee* to teach,
  What soon it teacheth all.

VI

Sit still as erst beside his feet!
  The future days are dim, —
But those will seem to thee most sweet
  Which keep thee nearest *him!*
Sit at his feet in quiet mirth.

And let him see arise
A clearer sun and greener earth
Within thy loving eyes ! —

VII

Ah, loving eyes ! that used to lift
Your childhood to my face —
That leave a memory on the gift
I look on in your place —
May bright-eyed hosts your guardians be
From all but thankful tears, —
While, brightly as you turn on *me*
Ye meet th' advancing years !

MY DOVES

> 'O Weisheit ! Du red'st wie eine Taube !'
> — *Goethe.*

My little doves have left a nest
Upon an Indian tree
Whose leaves fantastic take their rest
Or motion from the sea;
For ever there the sea-winds go
With sunlit paces to and fro.

The tropic flowers looked up to it,
The tropic stars looked down,
And there my little doves did sit
With feathers softly brown,
And glittering eyes that showed their right
To general Nature's deep delight.

And God them taught, at every close
Of murmuring waves beyond
And green leaves round, to interpose
Their choral voices fond,
Interpreting that love must be
The meaning of the earth and sea.

Fit ministers ! Of living loves
Theirs hath the calmest fashion,
Their living voice the likest moves
To lifeless intonation,
The lovely monotone of springs
And winds and such insensate things.

My little doves were ta'en away
From that glad nest of theirs
Across an ocean rolling gray
And tempest-clouded airs:
My little doves, who lately knew
The sky and wave by warmth and blue.

And now, within the city prison,
In mist and chillness pent,
With sudden upward look they listen
For sounds of past content,
For lapse of water, swell of breeze,
Or nut-fruit falling from the trees.

The stir without the glow of passion,
The triumph of the mart,
The gold and silver as they clash on
Man's cold metallic heart,
The roar of wheels, the cry for bread, —
These only sounds are heard instead.

Yet still, as on my human hand
Their fearless heads they lean,
And almost seem to understand
What human musings mean,
(Their eyes with such a plaintive shine
Are fastened upwardly to mine !) —

Soft falls their chant as on the nest
Beneath the sunny zone;
For love that stirred it in their breast
Has not aweary grown,
And 'neath the city's shade can keep
The well of music clear and deep.

And love, that keeps the music, fills
With pastoral memories;
All echoings from out the hills,
All droppings from the skies,
All flowings from the wave and wind,
Remembered in their chant, I find.

So teach ye me the wisest part,
My little doves ! to move
Along the city-ways with heart
Assured by holy love,
And vocal with such songs as own
A fountain to the world unknown.

'T was hard to sing by Babel's stream —
More hard, in Babel's street:
But if the soulless creatures deem
Their music not unmeet
For sunless walls — let *us* begin,
Who wear immortal wings within !

To me, fair memories belong
Of scenes that used to bless,
For no regret, but present song
And lasting thankfulness,
And very soon to break away,
Like types, in purer things than they.

I will have hopes that cannot fade,
For flowers the valley yields;
I will have humble thoughts instead
Of silent, dewy fields:
My spirit and my God shall be
My seaward hill, my boundless sea.

TO MARY RUSSELL MITFORD

IN HER GARDEN

What time I lay these rhymes anear thy feet,
Benignant friend, I will not proudly say
As better poets use, 'These *flowers* I lay,'
Because I would not wrong thy roses sweet,
Blaspheming so their name. And yet, repeat
Thou, overleaning them this springtime day,
With heart as open to love as theirs to May,
—'Low-rooted verse may reach some heavenly heat,
Even like my blossoms, if as nature-true
Though not as precious.' Thou art unperplext—
Dear friend, in whose dear writings drops the dew
And blow the natural airs,—thou, who art next
To nature's self in cheering the world's view,—
To preach a sermon on so known a text!

THE STUDENT

'Τί οὖν τοῦτο πρὸς σε; καὶ οὐδὲν λέγω ὅτι πρὸς τὸν τεθνηκότα, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸν ζῶντα, τί ὁ ἔπαινος.'—*Marcus Antoninus.*

'My midnight lamp is weary as my soul,
And, being unimmortal, has gone out.
And now alone yon moony lamp of heaven,
Which God lit and not man, illuminates
These volumes, others wrote in weariness
As I have read them; and this cheek and brow,
Whose paleness, burnèd in with heats of thought,
Would make an angel smile to see how ill
Clay thrust from Paradise consorts with mind—
If angels could, like men, smile bitterly.
'Yet, must my brow be pale? I have vowed
To clip it with the crown which cannot fade,
When *it* is faded. Not in vain ye cry,
O glorious voices that survive the tongues
From whence was drawn your separate sovereignty—
For I would reign beside you! I would melt
The golden treasures of my health and life
Into that name! My lips are vowed apart
From cheerful words; mine ears, from pleasant sounds;
Mine eyes, from sights God made so beautiful,—
My feet, from wanderings under shady trees;
Mine hands, from clasping of dear-loving friends,—
My very heart, from feelings which move soft!
Vowed am I from the day's delightsomeness,
And dreams of night! and when the house is dumb
In sleep, which is the pause 'twixt life and life,
I live and waken thus; and pluck away
Slumber's sleek poppies from my painèd lids—
Goading my mind with thongs wrought by herself,
To toil and struggle along this mountain-path
Which hath no mountain-airs; until she sweat
Like Adam's brow, and gasp, and rend away
In agony, her garment of the flesh!'

And so his midnight lamp was lit anew,
And burned till morning. But his lamp of life
Till morning burned not! He was found embraced,
Close, cold, and stiff, by Death's compelling sleep;
His breast and brow supported on a page
Charàctered over with a praise of *fame*,
Of its divineness and beatitude—
Words which had often caused that heart to throb,

That cheek to burn; though silent lay they now,
Without a single beating in the pulse,
And all the fever gone!

I saw a bay
Spring verdant from a newly-fashioned grave.
The grass upon the grave was verdanter,
That being watered by the eyes of One
Who bore not to look up toward the tree!
Others looked on it — some, with passing glance,
Because the light wind stirrèd in its leaves;
And some, with sudden lighting of the soul
In admiration's ecstasy! — Ay! some
Did wag their heads like oracles, and say,
''T is very well!' — but none rememberèd
The heart which housed the root, except that ONE
Whose sight was lost in weeping!

Is it thus,
Ambition, idol of the intellect?
Shall we drink aconite, alone to use
Thy golden bowl? and sleep ourselves to death —
To dream thy visions about life? O Power
That art a very feebleness! — before
Thy clayey feet we bend our knees of clay,
And round thy senseless brow bind diadems
With paralytic hands, and shout 'a god,'
With voices mortal hoarse! Who can discern
Th' infirmities they share in? Being blind,
We cannot see thy blindness: being weak,
We cannot feel thy weakness: being low,
We cannot mete thy baseness: being unwise,
We cannot understand thy idiocy!

THE EXILE'S RETURN

I

WHEN from thee, weeping I removed,
And from my land for years,
I thought not to return, Beloved,
With those same parting tears.
I come again to hill and lea,
Weeping for thee.

II

I clasped thine hand when standing last
Upon the shore in sight.
The land is green, the ship is fast,
I shall be there to-night.
I shall be there — no longer *we* —
No more with thee!

III

Had I beheld thee dead and still,
I might more clearly know
How heart of thine could turn as chill
As hearts by nature so;
How change could touch the falsehood-free
And changeless *thee.*

IV

But, now thy fervid looks last-seen
Within my soul remain,
'T is hard to think that *they* have been,
To be no more again —
That I shall vainly wait, ah me!
A word from thee.

V

I could not bear to look upon
That mound of funeral clay
Where one sweet voice is silence — one
Æthereal brow, decay;
Where all thy mortal I may see,
But never thee.

VI

For thou art where all friends are gone
Whose parting pain is o'er;
And I, who love and weep alone,
Where thou wilt weep no more,
Weep bitterly and selfishly
For *me*, not *thee.*

VII

I know, Beloved, thou canst not know
That I endure this pain;
For saints in heaven, the Scriptures show,
Can never grieve again:
And grief known mine, even there, would be
Still shared by thee.

A SONG AGAINST SINGING

TO E. J. H.

I

THEY bid me sing to thee,
Thou golden-haired and silver-voicèd child —
With lips by no worse sigh than sleep's defiled —

With eyes unknowing how tears dim the sight,
And feet all trembling at the new delight
Treaders of earth to be!

II

Ah no! the lark may bring
A song to thee from out the morning cloud,
The merry river from its lilies bowed,
The brisk rain from the trees, the lucky wind
That half doth make its music, half doth find, —
But *I* — I may not sing.

III

How could I think it right,
New-comer on our earth as, Sweet, thou art,
To bring a verse from out a human heart
Made heavy with accumulated tears,
And cross with such amount of weary years
Thy day-sum of delight?

IV

Even if the verse were said,
Thou — who wouldst clap thy tiny hands to hear
The wind or rain, gay bird or river clear —
Wouldst, at that sound of sad humanities,
Upturn thy bright uncomprehending eyes
And bid me play instead.

V

Therefore no song of mine, —
But prayer in place of singing; prayer that would
Commend thee to the new-creating God
Whose gift is childhood's heart without its stain
Of weakness, ignorance, and changing vain —
That gift of God be thine!

VI

So wilt thou aye be young,
In lovelier childhood than thy shining brow
And pretty winning accents make thee now:
Yea, sweeter than this scarce articulate sound
(How sweet!) of 'father,' 'mother,' shall be found
The Abba on thy tongue.

VII

And so, as years shall chase
Each other's shadows, thou wilt less resemble
Thy fellows of the earth who toil and tremble,
Than him thou seèst not, thine angel bold
Yet meek, whose ever-lifted eyes behold
The Ever-loving's face.

STANZAS

I MAY sing; but minstrel's singing
Ever ceaseth with his playing.
I may smile; but time is bringing
Thoughts for smiles to wear away in.
I may view thee, mutely loving;
But *shall* view thee so in dying!
I may sigh; but life's removing,
And with breathing endeth sighing!
Be it so!

When no song of mine comes near thee,
Will its memory fail to soften?
When no smile of mine can cheer thee,
Will thy smile be used as often?
When my looks the darkness boundeth,
Will thine own be lighted after?
When my sigh no longer soundeth,
Wilt thou list another's laughter?
Be it so!

THE YOUNG QUEEN

'This awful responsibility is imposed upon me so suddenly and at so early a period of my life, that I should feel myself utterly oppressed by the burden, were I not sustained by the hope that Divine Providence, which has called me to this work, will give me strength for the performance of it.'
— *The Queen's Declaration in Council.*

I

THE shroud is yet unspread
To wrap our crownèd dead;
His soul hath scarcely hearkened for the thrilling word of doom;
And Death, that makes serene
Ev'n brows where crowns have been,
Hath scarcely time to meeten his for silence of the tomb.

II

St. Paul's king-dirging note
The city's heart hath smote —

The city's heart is struck with thought more solemn than the tone!
A shadow sweeps apace
Before the nation's face,
Confusing in a shapeless blot the sepulchre and throne.

III

The palace sounds with wail —
The courtly dames are pale —
A widow o'er the purple bows, and weeps its splendor dim:
And we who hold the boon,
A king for freedom won,
Do feel eternity rise up between our thanks and him.

IV

And while all things express
All glory's nothingness,
A royal maiden treadeth firm where *that* departed trod!
The deathly scented crown
Weighs her shining ringlets down;
But calm she lifts her trusting face, and calleth upon God.

V

Her thoughts are deep within her:
No outward pageants win her
From memories that in her soul are rolling wave on wave —
Her palace walls enring
The dust that was a king —
And very cold beneath her feet, she feels her father's grave.

VI

And One, as fair as she,
Can scarce forgotten be, —
Who clasped a little infant dead, for all a kingdom's worth!
The mournèd, blessèd One,
Who views Jehovah's throne,
Aye smiling to the angels, that she lost a throne on earth.

VII

Perhaps our youthful Queen
Remembers what has been —
Her childhood's rest by loving heart, and sport on grassy sod —
Alas! can others wear
A mother's heart for her?
But calm she lifts her trusting face, and calleth upon God.

VIII

Yea! call on God, thou maiden
Of spirit nobly laden,
And leave such happy days behind, for happy-making years!
A nation looks to thee
For steadfast sympathy:
Make room within thy bright clear eyes for all its gathered tears.

IX

And so the grateful isles
Shall give thee back their smiles,
And as thy mother joys in thee, in them shalt *thou* rejoice;
Rejoice to meekly bow
A somewhat paler brow,
While the King of kings shall bless thee by the British people's voice!

VICTORIA'S TEARS

'Hark! the reiterated clangor sounds!
Now murmurs, like the sea or like the storm,
Or like the flames on forests, move and mount
From rank to rank, and loud and louder roll,
Till all the people is one vast applause.'
— LANDOR'S *Gebir.*

'O MAIDEN! heir of kings!
A king has left his place!
The majesty of Death has swept
All other from his face!
And thou upon thy mother's breast
No longer lean adown,
But take the glory for the rest,
And rule the land that loves thee best!'
She heard, and wept —
She wept, to wear a crown!

They decked her courtly halls;
They reined her hundred steeds;
They shouted at her palace gate,
'A noble Queen succeeds!'
Her name has stirred the mountain's sleep
Her praise has filled the town!
And mourners God had stricken deep,
Looked hearkening up, and did not weep.
Alone she wept,
Who wept, to wear a crown!

She saw no purples shine,
For tears had dimmed her eyes;
She only knew her childhood's flowers
Were happier pageantries!

And while her heralds played the part,
For million shouts to drown —
'God save the Queen' from hill to mart, —
She heard through all her beating heart,
And turned and wept —
She wept, to wear a crown!

God save thee, weeping Queen!
Thou shalt be well beloved!
The tyrant's sceptre cannot move,
As those pure tears have moved!
The nature in thine eyes we see,
That tyrants cannot own —
The love that guardeth liberties!
Strange blessing on the nation lies,
Whose Sovereign wept —
Yea! wept, to wear its crown!

God bless thee, weeping Queen,
With blessing more divine!
And fill with happier love than earth's
That tender heart of thine!
That when the thrones of earth shall be
As low as graves brought down,
A piercèd Hand may give to thee
The crown which angels shout to see!
Thou wilt not *weep*,
To wear that heavenly crown!

VANITIES

'From fading things, fond men, lift your desire.'
— *Drummond.*

Could ye be very blest in hearkening
Youth's often danced-to melodies —
Hearing it piped, the midnight darkening
Doth come to show the starry skies, —
To freshen garden-flowers, the rain? —
It is in vain, it is in vain!

Could ye be very blest in urging
A captive nation's strength to thunder
Out into foam, and with its surging
The Xerxean fetters break asunder?
The storm is cruel as the chain! —
It is in vain, it is in vain!

Could ye be very blest in paling
Your brows with studious nights and days,
When like your lamps your life is failing,
And sighs, not breath, are wrought from praise?
Your tombs, not ye, that praise retain —
It is in vain, it is in vain!

Yea! but ye *could* be very blest,
If some ye nearest love were nearest!
Must *they* not love when lovèd best?
Must *ye* not happiest love when dearest?
Alas! how hard to feel again, —
It is in vain, it is in vain!

For those ye love are not unsighing —
They are unchanging least of all:
And ye the loved — ah! no denying,
Will leave your lips beneath the pall,
When passioned ones have o'er it sain
'It is in vain, it is in vain!'

BEREAVEMENT

When some Beloveds, 'neath whose eyelids lay
The sweet lights of my childhood, one by one
Did leave me dark before the natural sun,
And I astonied fell and could not pray, —
A thought within me to myself did say,
'Is God less God, that *thou* art left undone?
Rise, worship, bless Him, in this sackcloth spun,
As in that purple!' — But I answered Nay!
What child his filial heart in words can loose
If he behold his tender father raise
The hand that chastens sorely? can he choose
But sob in silence with an upward gaze? —
And *my* great Father, thinking fit to bruise,
Discerns in speechless tears both prayer and praise.

CONSOLATION

All are not taken; there are left behind
Living Belovèds, tender looks to bring
And make the daylight still a happy thing,
And tender voices, to make soft the wind:
But if it were not so — if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring
Where 'dust to dust' the love from life disjoined,

And if, before those sepulchres unmoving
I stood alone, (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moors in weary dearth,)
Crying 'Where are ye, O my loved and loving?'—
I know a Voice would sound, 'Daughter, I AM.
Can I suffice for HEAVEN and not for earth?'

A SUPPLICATION FOR LOVE

HYMN I

'The Lord Jesus, although gone to the Father, and we see Him no more, is still present with His Church; and in His heavenly glory expends upon her as intense a love, as in the agony of the garden, and the crucifixion of the tree. Those eyes that wept, still gaze upon her.' —*Recalled words of an extempore Discourse, preached at Sidmouth*, 1833.

GOD, namèd Love, whose fount Thou art,
Thy crownless Church before Thee stands,
With too much hating in her heart,
And too much striving in her hands!

O loving Lord! O slain for love!
Thy blood upon thy garments came—
Inwrap their folds our brows above,
Before we tell Thee all our shame!

'Love as I loved you,' was the sound
That on thy lips expiring sate!
Sweet words, in bitter strivings drowned!
We hated as the worldly hate.

The spear that pierced for love thy side,
We dared for wrathful use to crave;
And with our cruel noise denied
Its silence to thy blood-red grave!

Ah, blood! that speaketh more of love
Than Abel's—could we speak like Cain,
And grieve and scare that holy Dove,
The parting love-gift of the Slain?

Yet, Lord, thy wrongèd love fulfil!
Thy Church, though fallen, before Thee stands—
Behold, the voice is Jacob's still,
Albeit the hands are Esau's hands!

Hast Thou no tears, like those besprent
Upon thy Zion's ancient part?
No moving looks, like those which sent
Their softness through a traitor's heart?

No touching tale of anguish dear;
Whereby like children we may creep,
All trembling, to each other near,
And view each other's face, and weep?

Oh, move us—THOU hast power to move—
One in the one Beloved to be!
Teach us the heights and depths of love—
Give THINE—that we may love like THEE!

THE MEDIATOR

HYMN II

'As the greatest of all sacrifices was required, we may be assured that no other would have sufficed.'—BOYD's *Essay on the Atonement*.

How high Thou art! our songs can own
No music Thou couldst stoop to hear!
But still the Son's expiring groan
Is vocal in the Father's ear.

How pure Thou art! our hands are dyed
With curses, red with murder's hue—
But HE hath stretched HIS hands to hide
The sins that pierced them from thy view.

How strong Thou art! we tremble lest
The thunders of thine arm be moved—
But HE is lying on thy breast,
And Thou must clasp thy best Beloved!

How kind Thou art! Thou didst not choose
To joy in Him for ever so;
But that embrace Thou wilt not loose
For vengeance, didst for love forego!

High God, and pure, and strong, and kind!
The low, the foul, the feeble, spare!
Thy brightness in his face we find—
Behold our darkness only *there!*

THE WEEPING SAVIOUR

HYMN III

—— tell
Whether His countenance can thee affright,
Tears in His eyes quench the amazing light.'
—*Donne.*

When Jesus' friend had ceased to be,
Still Jesus' heart its friendship kept —
'Where have ye laid him?' — 'Come and see!'
But ere his eyes could see, they wept.

Lord! not in sepulchres alone
Corruption's worm is rank and free:
The shroud of death our bosoms own —
The shades of sorrow! Come and see!

Come, Lord! God's image cannot shine
Where sin's funereal darkness lowers —
Come! Turn those weeping eyes of thine
Upon these sinning souls of ours!

And let those eyes with shepherd care
Their moving watch above us keep;
Till love the strength of sorrow wear,
And, as Thou weepedst, *we* may weep!

For surely we may weep to know,
So dark and deep our spirits' stain;
That, had thy blood refused to flow
Thy very tears had flowed in vain.

THE MEASURE

HYMN IV

'He comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure' (שליש). — *Isaiah* xl.
'Thou givest them tears to drink in a measure' (שליש)[1]. — *Psalm* lxxx.

I

God the Creator, with a pulseless hand
Of unoriginated power, hath weighed
The dust of earth and tears of man in one
Measure, and by one weight:
So saith his holy book.

II

Shall we, then, who have issued from the dust
And there return. — shall we, who toil for dust,
And wrap our winnings in this dusty life,
Say 'No more tears, Lord God!
The measure runneth o'er'?

III

Oh, Holder of the balance, laughest Thou?
Nay, Lord! be gentler to our foolishness,
For his sake who assumed our dust and turns
On Thee pathetic eyes
Still moistened with our tears.

IV

And teach us, O our Father, while we weep,
To look in patience upon earth and learn —
Waiting, in that meek gesture, till it last
These tearful eyes be filled
With the dry dust of death.

COWPER'S GRAVE

I

It is a place where poets crowned may feel the heart's decaying;
It is a place where happy saints may weep amid their praying;
Yet let the grief and humbleness as low as silence languish:
Earth surely now may give her calm to whom she gave her anguish.

II

O poets, from a maniac's tongue was poured the deathless singing!
O Christians, at your cross of hope a hopeless hand was clinging!
O men, this man in brotherhood your weary paths beguiling,
Groaned inly while he taught you peace, and died while ye were smiling!

III

And now, what time ye all may read through dimming tears his story,
How discord on the music fell and darkness on the glory,
And how when, one by one, sweet sounds and wandering lights departed,
He wore no less a loving face because so broken-hearted,

---

[1] I believe that the word occurs in no other part of the Hebrew Scriptures.

IV

He shall be strong to sanctify the poet's high vocation,
And bow the meekest Christian down in meeker adoration;
Nor ever shall he be, in praise, by wise or good forsaken,
Named softly as the household name of one whom God hath taken.

V

With quiet sadness and no gloom I learn to think upon him,
With meekness that is gratefulness to God whose heaven hath won him,
Who suffered once the madness-cloud to his own love to blind him,
But gently led the blind along where breath and bird could find him;

VI

And wrought within his shattered brain such quick poetic senses
As hills have language for, and stars, harmonious influences:
The pulse of dew upon the grass kept his within its number,
And silent shadows from the trees refreshed him like a slumber.

VII

Wild timid hares were drawn from woods to share his home-caresses,
Uplooking to his human eyes with sylvan tendernesses:
The very world, by God's constraint, from falsehood's ways removing,
Its women and its men became, beside him, true and loving.

VIII

And though, in blindness, he remained unconscious of that guiding,
And things provided came without the sweet sense of providing,
He testified this solemn truth, while phrenzy desolated,
— Nor man nor nature satisfies whom only God created.

IX

Like a sick child that knoweth not his mother while she blesses
And drops upon his burning brow the coolness of her kisses, —
That turns his fevered eyes around, — 'My mother! where 's my mother?' —
As if such tender words and deeds could come from any other! —

X

The fever gone, with leaps of heart he sees her bending o'er him,
Her face all pale from watchful love, the unweary love she bore him!
Thus woke the poet from the dream his life's long fever gave him,
Beneath those deep pathetic Eyes which closed in death to save him.

XI

Thus? oh, not *thus!* no type of earth can image that awaking,
Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of seraphs, round him breaking,
Or felt the new immortal throb of soul from body parted,
But felt those eyes alone, and knew — '*My* Saviour! *not* deserted!'

XII

Deserted! Who hath dreamt that when the cross in darkness rested,
Upon the Victim's hidden face no love was manifested?
What frantic hands outstretched have e'er the atoning drops averted?
What tears have washed them from the soul, that *one* should be deserted?

XIII

Deserted! God could separate from his own essence rather;
And Adam's sins *have* swept between the righteous Son and Father:
Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry his universe hath shaken —
It went up single, echoless, 'My God, I am forsaken!'

XIV

It went up from the Holy's lips amid his lost creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation!

That Earth's worst phrenzies, marring hope, should mar not hope's fruition,
And I, on Cowper's grave, should see his rapture in a vision.

THE WEAKEST THING

I

Which is the weakest thing of all
Mine heart can ponder?
The sun, a little cloud can pall
With darkness yonder?
The cloud, a little wind can move
Where'er it listeth?
The wind, a little leaf above,
Though sere, resisteth?

II

What time that yellow leaf was green,
My days were gladder;
But now, whatever Spring may mean,
I must grow sadder.
Ah me! a *leaf* with sighs can wring
My lips asunder?
Then is mine heart the weakest thing
Itself can ponder.

III

Yet, Heart, when sun and cloud are pined
And drop together,
And at a blast which is not wind
The forests wither,
Thou, from the darkening deathly curse
To glory breakest,—
The Strongest of the universe
Guarding the weakest!

THE PET-NAME

. . . the name
Which from THEIR lips seemed a caress.'
—Miss Mitford's *Dramatic Scenes.*

First printed under the title of 'The Name.' This name, as all the world knows since the publication of Mrs. Browning's most intimate correspondence, was the monosyllable Bā, (pronounced *bay*).

I

I have a name, a little name,
Uncadenced for the ear,
Unhonored by ancestral claim,
Unsanctified by prayer and psalm
The solemn font anear.

II

It never did to pages wove
For gay romance belong;
It never dedicate did move
As 'Sacharissa' unto love,
'Orinda' unto song.

III

Though I write books, it will be read
Upon the leaves of none,
And afterward, when I am dead,
Will ne'er be graved for sight or tread,
Across my funeral-stone.

IV

This name, whoever chance to call,
Perhaps your smile may win:
Nay, do not smile! mine eyelids fall
Over mine eyes and feel withal
The sudden tears within.

V

Is there a leaf, that greenly grows
Where summer meadows bloom,
But gathereth the winter snows
And changeth to the hue of those,
If lasting till they come?

VI

Is there a word, or jest, or game,
But time incrusteth round
With sad associate thoughts the same?
And so to me my very name
Assumes a mournful sound.

VII

My brother gave that name to me
When we were children twain,
When names acquired baptismally
Were hard to utter, as to see
That life had any pain.

VIII

No shade was on us then, save one
Of chestnuts from the hill;
And through the word our laugh did run
As part thereof: the mirth being done,
He calls me by it still.

IX

Nay, do not smile! I hear in it
What none of you can hear,—

The talk upon the willow seat,
The bird and wind that did repeat
Around, our human cheer.

X

I hear the birthday's noisy bliss,
My sisters' woodland glee,
My father's praise I did not miss,
When stooping down he cared to kiss
The poet at his knee, —

XI

And voices which, to name me, aye
Their tenderest tones were keeping —
To some I never more can say
An answer till God wipes away
In heaven these drops of weeping.

XII

My name to me a sadness wears:
No murmurs cross my mind —
Now God be thanked for these thick tears
Which show, of those departed years,
Sweet memories left behind.

XIII

Now God be thanked for years enwrought
With love which softens yet:
Now God be thanked for every thought
Which is so tender it has caught
Earth's guerdon of regret.

XIV

Earth saddens, never shall remove
Affections purely given;
And e'en that mortal grief shall prove
The immortality of love,
And heighten it with Heaven.

'SINCE WITHOUT THEE WE DO NO GOOD'

HYMN

'Lord, I cry unto thee, make haste unto me.' — *Psalm* cxli.

'The Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him.' — *Psalm* cxlv.

'This hymn was included among the few fugitive pieces bound up with Miss Barrett's first and subsequently suppressed translation of the *Prometheus Bound.*'

SINCE without Thee we do no good,
And with Thee do no ill,
Abide with us in weal and woe, —
In action and in will.

In weal, — that while our lips confess
The Lord who 'gives,' we may
Remember, with an humble thought,
The Lord who 'takes away.'

In woe, — that, while to drowning tears
Our hearts their joys resign,
We may remember *who* can turn
Such water into wine.

By hours of day, — that when our feet
O'er hill and valley run,
We still may think the light of truth
More welcome than the sun.

By hours of night, — that when the air
Its dew and shadow yields,
We still may hear the voice of God
In silence of the fields.

Oh ! then sleep comes on us like death,
All soundless, deaf and deep:
Lord ! teach us so to watch and pray,
That death may come like sleep.

Abide with *us*, abide with *us*,
While flesh and soul agree;
And when our flesh is only dust,
Abide our souls with *Thee.*

QUEEN ANNELIDA AND FALSE ARCITE

(MODERNIZED FROM CHAUCER)

First published in *The Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer Modernized* (London, 1841). This volume was edited by R. H. Horne, who contributed some of the modernizations. Wordsworth, who had first suggested the scheme of turning Chaucer into modern English verse, made several contributions, as did also Leigh Hunt. Tennyson and Robert Browning were invited to coöperate in the work, but declined. Miss Barrett executed the modernization, here reprinted, of Queen Annelida's story, and gave critical assistance about the whole compilation.

I

O THOU fierce God of armies, Mars the red,
Who in thy frosty country callèd Thrace,

Within thy grisly temples full of dread,
Art honored as the patron of that place,
With the Bellona Pallas, full of grace!
Be present; guide, sustain this song of mine,
Beginning which, I cry toward thy shrine.

II

For deep the hope is sunken in my mind,
In piteous-hearted English to indite
This story old, which I in Latin find,
Of Queen Annelida and false Arcite:
Since Time, whose rust can all things fret and bite,
In fretting many a tale of equal fame,
Hath from our memory nigh devoured this same.

III

Thy favor, Polyhymnia, also deign
Who, in thy sisters' green Parnassian glade,
By Helicon, not far from Cirrha's fane,
Singest with voice memorial in the shade
Under the laurel which can never fade;
Now grant my ship, that some smooth haven win her!
I follow Statius first, and then Corinna.

IV

When Theseus by a long and deathly war
The hardy Scythian race had overcome,
He, laurel-crownèd, in his gold-wrought car,
Returning to his native city home,
The blissful people for his pomp make room,
And throw their shouts up to the stars, and bring
The general heart out for his honoring.

V

Before the Duke, in sign of victory,
The trumpets sound, and in his banner large
Dilates the figure of Mars — and men may see,
In token of glory, many a treasure charge,
Many a bright helm, and many a spear and targe,
Many a fresh knight, and many a blissful rout
On horse and foot, in all the field about.

VI

Hippolyte, his wife, the heroic queen
Of Scythia, conqueress though conquerèd,
With Emily, her youthful sister sheen,
Fair in a car of gold he with him led.
The ground about her car she overspread
With brightness from the beauty in her face,
Which smiled forth largesses of love and grace.

VII

Thus triumphing, and laurel-crownèd thus,
In all the flower of Fortune's high providing,
I leave this noble prince, this Theseus,
Toward the walls of Athens bravely riding, —
And seek to bring in, without more abiding,
Something of that whereof I 'gan to write
Of fair Annelida and false Arcite.

VIII

Fierce Mars, who in his furious course of ire,
The ancient wrath of Juno to fulfil,
Had set the nations' mutual hearts on fire
In Thebes and Argos, (so that each would kill
Either with bloody spears,) grew never still —
But rushed now here, now there, among them both,
Till each was slain by each, they were so wroth.

IX

For when Parthenopæus and Tydeus
Had perished with Hippomedon, — alsò
Amphiaraus and proud Capaneus, —
And when the wretched Theban brethren two
Were slain, and King Adrastus home did go —
So desolate stood Thebes, her halls so bare,
That no man's love could remedy his care.

X

And when the old man, Creon, 'gan espy
How darkly the blood royal was brought down,
He held the city in his tyranny,
And forced the nobles of that regiòn
To be his friends and dwell within the town;
Till half for love of him, and half for fear,
Those princely persons yielded, and drew near, —

XI

Among the rest the young Armenian queen,
Annelida, was in that city living.
She was as beauteous as the sun was sheen,
Her fame to distant lands such glory giving
That all men in the world had some heart-striving
To look on her. No woman, sooth, can be,
Though earth is rich in fairness, fair as she.

XII

Young was this queen, but twenty summers old,
Of middle stature, and such wondrous beauty,
That Nature, self-delighted, did behold
A rare work in her — while, in stedfast duty,
Lucretia and Penelope would suit ye
With a worse model — all things understood,
She was, in short, most perfect fair and good.

XIII

The Theban knight eke, to give all their due,
Was young, and therewithal a lusty knight.
But he was double in love, and nothing true,
Ay, subtler in that craft than any wight,
And with his cunning won this lady bright;
So working on her simpleness of nature,
That she him trusted above every creature.

XIV

What shall I say? She lovèd Arcite so,
That if at any hour he parted from her,
Her heart seemed ready anon to burst in two;
For he with lowliness had overcome her:
She thought she knew the heart which did foredoom her.
But he was false, and all that softness feigning, —
I trow men need not learn such arts of paining.

XV

And ne'ertheless full mickle business
Had he, before he might his lady win, —
He swore that he should die of his distress,
His brain would madden with the fire within!
Alas, the while! for it was ruth and sin,
That she, sweet soul, upon his grief should rue;
But little reckon false hearts as the true.

XVI

And she to Arcite so subjected her,
That all she did or had seemed his of right:
No creature in her house met smile or cheer,
Further than would be pleasant to Arcite;
There was no lack whereby she did despite
To his least will — for hers to his was bent,
And all things which pleased him made her content.

XVII

No kind of letter to her fair hands came,
Touching on love, from any kind of wight,
But him she showed it ere she burned the same:
So open was she, doing all she might,
That nothing should be hidden from her knight,
Lest he for any untruth should upbraid her, —
The slave of his unspoken will she made her.

XVIII

He played his jealous fancies over her,
And if he heard that any other man
Spoke to her, would beseech her straight to swear
To each word — or the speaker had his ban;
And out of her sweet wits she almost ran
For fear; but all was fraud and flattery,
Since without love he feignèd jealousy.

XIX

All which with so much sweetness suffered she,
Whate'er he willed she thought the wisest thing;
And evermore she loved him tenderly,
And did him honor as he were a king.
Her heart was wedded to him with a ring,
So eager to be faithful and intent,
That wheresoe'er he wandered, there it went.

XX

When she would eat he stole away her thought,
Till little thought for food, I ween, was kept;
And when a time for rest the midnight brought,

She always mused upon him till she slept,—
When he was absent, secretly she wept;
And thus lived Queen Annelida the fair,
For false Arcite, who worked her this despair.

XXI

This false Arcite in his new-fangleness,
Because so gentle were her ways and true,
Took the less pleasure in her stedfastness,
And saw another lady proud and new,
And right anon he clad him in her hue;
I know not whether white, or red, or green,
Betraying fair Annelida the Queen.

XXII

And yet it was no thing to wonder on,
Though he were false—It is the way of man,
(Since Lamech was, who flourished years agone,)
To be in love as false as any can;
For he was the first father who began
To love two; and I trow, indeed, that he
Invented tents as well as bigamy.

XXIII

And having so betrayed her, false Arcite
Feign'd more, that primal wrong to justify.
A vicious horse will snort besides his bite;
And so he taunted her with treachery,
Swearing he saw thro' her duplicity,
And how she was not loving, but false-hearted—
The perjured traitor swore thus, and departed.

XXIV

Alas, alas, what heart could suffer it,
For ruth, the story of her grief to tell?
What thinker hath the cunning and the wit
To image it? what hearer, strength to dwell
A room's length off, while I rehearse the hell
Suffered by Queen Annelida the fair
For false Arcite, who worked her this despair?

XXV

She weepeth, waileth, swooneth piteously;
She falleth on the earth dead as a stone;
Her graceful limbs are cramped convulsively;
She speaketh out wild, as her wits were gone.
No color, but an ashen paleness—none—
Touched cheek or lips; and no word shook their white,
But 'Mercy, cruel heart! mine own Arcite!'

XXVI

Thus it continued, till she pinèd so,
And grew so weak, her feet no more could bear
Her body, languishing in ceaseless woe.
Whereof Arcite had neither ruth nor care—
His heart had put out new-green shoots elsewhere;
Therefore he deigned not on her grief to think,
And reckoned little, did she float or sink.

XXVII

His fine new lady kept him in such narrow
Strict limit, by the bridle, at the end
O' the whip, he feared her least word as an arrow,—
Her threatening made him, as a bow, to bend,
And at her pleasure did he turn and wend;
Seeing she never granted to this lover
A single grace he could sing 'Ios' over.

XXVIII

She drove him forth—she scarcely deigned to know
That he was servant to her ladyship:
But, lest he should be proud, she kept him low,
Nor paid his service from a smiling lip:
She sent him now to land, and now to ship;
And giving him all danger to his fill,
She thereby had him at her sovereign will.

XXIX

Be taught of this, ye prudent women all,
Warn'd by Annelida and false Arcite:
Because she chose, himself, 'dear heart' to call
And be so meek, he loved her not aright.
The nature of man's heart is to delight
In something strange—moreover, (may Heaven save
The wrong'd) the thing they cannot, they would have.

XXX

Now turn we to Annelida again,
Who pinèd day by day in languishment.
But when she saw no comfort met her pain,
Weeping once in a woeful unconstraint,
She set herself to fashion a complaint,
Which with her own pale hand she 'gan to write,
And sent it to her lover, to Arcite.

THE COMPLAINT OF ANNELIDA TO FALSE ARCITE

I

The sword of sorrow, whetted sharp for me
On false delight, with point of memory
Stabb'd so mine heart, bliss-bare and black of hue,
That all to dread is turn'd my dance's glee,
My face's beauty to despondency —
For nothing it availeth to be true —
And, whosoever is so, she shall rue
Obeying love, and cleaving faithfully
Alway to one, and changing for no new.

II

I ought to know it well as any wight,
For I loved one with all my heart and might,
More than myself a hundred-thousand fold,
And callèd him my heart's dear life, my knight,
And was all his, as far as it was right;
His gladness did my blitheness make of old,
And in his least disease my death was told;
Who, on his side, had plighted lovers' plight,
Me, evermore, his lady and love to hold.

III

Now is he false — alas, alas ! — although
Unwronged ! and acting such a ruthless part,
That with a little word he will not deign
To bring the peace back to my mournful heart.
Drawn in, and caught up by another's art,
Right as he will, he laugheth at my pain;
While I — I cannot my weak heart restrain
From loving him — still, aye; yet none I know
To whom of all this grief I can complain.

IV

Shall I complain (ah, piteous and harsh sound !)
Unto my foe, who gave mine heart a wound,
And still desireth that the harm be more ?
Now certes, if I sought the whole earth round,
No other help, no better leech were found !
My destiny hath shaped it so of yore —
I would not other medicine, nor yet lore.
I would be ever where I once was bound;
And what I said, would say for evermore.

V

Alas ! and where is gone your gentillesse ?
Where gone your pleasant words, your humbleness ?
Where your devotion full of reverent fear,
Your patient loyalty, your busy address
To me, whom once you callèd nothing less
Than mistress, sovereign lady, i' the sphere
O' the world ? Ah me ! no word, no look of cheer,
Will you vouchsafe upon my heaviness !
Alas your love ! I bought it all too dear.

VI

Now certes, sweet, howe'er you be
The cause so, and so causelessly,
Of this my mortal agony,
Your reason should amend the failing !
Your friend, your true love, do you flee,
Who never in time nor yet degree
Grieved you: so may the all-knowing he
Save my lorn soul from future wailing.

VII

Because I was so plain, Arcite,
In all my doings, your delight
Seeking in all things, where I might
In honor, — meek and kind and free;
Therefore you do me such despite.
Alas ! howe'er through cruelty
My heart with sorrow's sword you smite,
You cannot kill its love. — Ah me !

VIII

Ah, my sweet foe, why do you so
For shame ?

Think you that praise, in sooth, will raise
Your name,
Loving anew, and being untrue
For aye?
Thus casting down your manhood's crown
In blame,
And working me adversity,
The same
Who loves you most — (O God, thou know'st!)
Alway?
Yet turn again — be fair and plain
Some day;
And then shall this, that seems amiss,
Be game,
All being forgiv'n, while yet from heav'n
I stay.

IX

Behold, dear heart, I write this to obtain
Some knowledge, whether I should pray or 'plaine:
Which way is best to force you to be true?
For either I must have you in my chain,
Or you, sweet, with the death must part us twain;
There is no mean, no other way more new:
And, that Heaven's mercy on my soul may rue
And let you slay me outright with this pain,
The whiteness in my cheeks may prove to you.

X

For hitherto mine own death have I sought;
Myself I murder with my secret thought,
In sorrow and ruth of your unkindnesses!
I weep, I wail, I fast — all helpeth nought,
I flee all joy (I mean the name of aught),
I flee all company, all mirthfulness —
Why, who can make her boast of more distress
Than I? To such a plight you have me brought,
Guiltless (I need no witness) ne'ertheless.

XI

Shall I go pray and wail my womanhood?
Compared to such a deed, death's self were good.
What! ask for mercy, and guiltless — where 's the need?
And if I wailed my life so, — that you would
Care nothing, is less feared than understood:
And if mine oath of love I dared to plead
In mine excuse, — your scorn would be its meed.
Ah, love! it giveth flowers instead of seed —
Full long ago I might have taken heed.

XII

And though I had you back to-morrow again,
I might as well hold April from the rain
As hold you to the vows you vowed me last.
Maker of all things, and truth's sovereign,
Where is the truth of man, who hath it slain,
That she who loveth him should find him fast
As in a tempest is a rotten mast?
Is that a tame beast which is ever fain
To flee us when restraint and fear are past?

XIII

Now mercy, sweet, if I mis-say; —
Have I said aught is wrong to-day?
I do not know — my wit 's astray —
I fare as doth the song of one who weepeth;
For now I 'plaine, and now I play —
I am so 'mazed, I die away —
Arcite, you have the key for aye
Of all my world, and all the good it keepeth.

XIV

And in this world there is not one
Who walketh with a sadder moan,
And bears more grief than I have done;
And if light slumbers overcome me,
Methinks your image, in the glory
Of skyey azure, stands before me,
Re-vowing the old love you bore me,
And praying for new mercy from me.

XV

Through the long night, this wondrous sight,
Bear I,
Which haunteth still, the daylight, till
I die:
But nought of this, your heart, I wis,
Can reach.

Mine eyes down-pour, they nevermore
Are dry,
While to your ruth, and eke your truth,
I cry —
But, weladay, too far be they
To fetch.
Thus destiny is holding me —
Ah, wretch !
And when I fain would break the chain,
And try —
Faileth my wit (so weak is it)
With speech.

XVI

Therefore I end thus, since my hope is o'er —
I give all up both now and evermore;
And in the balance ne'er again will lay
My safety, nor be studious in love-lore.
But like the swan who, as I heard of yore,
Singeth life's penance on his deathly day,
So I sing here my life and woes away, —
Ay, how you, cruel Arcite, wounded sore,
With memory's point, your poor Annelida.

XVII

After Annelida, the woeful queen,
Had written in her own hand in this wise,
With ghastly face, less pale than white, I ween,
She fell a-swooning; then she 'gan arise,
And unto Mars voweth a sacrifice
Within the temple, with a sorrowful bearing,
And in such phrase as meets your present hearing.

POEMS OF 1844

In 1844 appeared, *Poems. By Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, Author of The Seraphim, etc. In two volumes. (London, Edward Moxon, Dover Street.)* This edition, the last which bore Mrs. Browning's maiden name, was dedicated to her father, and 'A Drama of Exile' was its initial and longest poem. Her mind, as when she wrote 'The Seraphim,' was still preoccupied by the idea of casting the stupendous incidents of the Christian story into a form approximating that of Greek tragedy.

A DRAMA OF EXILE

'De patrie, et de Dieu, des poêtes, de l'âme
Qui s'élève en priant.' —*Victor Hugo.*

PERSONS

CHRIST, *in a Vision.*
ADAM.
EVE.
GABRIEL.
LUCIFER.

Angels, Eden Spirits, Earth Spirits, and Phantasms.

SCENE. — *The outer side of the gate of Eden shut fast with cloud, from the depth of which revolves a sword of fire self-moved.* ADAM *and* EVE *are seen in the distance flying along the glare.*

LUCIFER, *alone.*

REJOICE in the clefts of Gehenna,
My exiled, my host !
Earth has exiles as hopeless as when a
Heaven's empire was lost.
Through the seams of her shaken foundations,
Smoke up in great joy !
With the smoke of your fierce exultations
Deform and destroy !
Smoke up with your lurid revenges,
And darken the face
Of the white heavens and taunt them with changes
From glory and grace.
We, in falling, while destiny strangles,
Pull down with us all.
Let them look to the rest of their angels !
Who 's safe from a fall ?
HE saves not. Where 's Adam ? Can pardon
Requicken that sod ?
Unkinged is the King of the Garden,
The image of God.
Other exiles are cast out of Eden, —
More curse has been hurled:
Come up, O my locusts, and feed in
The green of the world !
Come up ! we have conquered by evil:
Good reigns not alone:

I prevail now, and, angel or devil,
Inherit a throne.
[*In sudden apparition a watch of innumerable* Angels, *rank above rank, slopes up from around the gate to the zenith. The* Angel GABRIEL *descends.*
Lucifer. Hail, Gabriel, the keeper of the gate!
Now that the fruit is plucked, prince Gabriel,
I hold that Eden is impregnable
Under thy keeping.
Gabriel. Angel of the sin,
Such as thou standest, — pale in the drear light
Which rounds the rebel's work with Maker's wrath, —
Thou shalt be an Idea to all souls,
A monumental melancholy gloom
Seen down all ages, whence to mark despair
And measure out the distances from good.
Go from us straightway!
Lucifer. Wherefore?
Gabriel. Lucifer,
Thy last step in this place trod sorrow up.
Recoil before that sorrow, if not this sword.
Lucifer. Angels are in the world — wherefore not I?
Exiles are in the world — wherefore not I?
The cursed are in the world — wherefore not I?
Gabriel. Depart!
Lucifer. And where 's the logic of 'depart'?
Our lady Eve had half been satisfied
To obey her Maker, if I had not learnt
To fix my postulate better. Dost thou dream
Of guarding some monopoly in heaven
Instead of earth? Why, I can dream with thee
To the length of thy wings.
Gabriel. I do not dream.
This is not heaven, even in a dream, nor earth,
As earth was once, first breathed among the stars,
Articulate glory from the mouth divine,
To which the myriad spheres thrilled audibly,
Touched like a lute-string, and the sons of God
Said AMEN, singing it. I know that this
Is earth not new created but new cursed —
This, Eden's gate not opened but built up
With a final cloud of sunset. Do I dream?
Alas, not so! this is the Eden lost
By Lucifer the serpent; this the sword
(This sword alive with justice and with fire)
That smote, upon the forehead, Lucifer
The angel. Wherefore, angel, go — depart!
Enough is sinned and suffered.
Lucifer. By no means.
Here 's a brave earth to sin and suffer on:
It holds fast still — it cracks not under curse;
It holds like mine immortal. Presently
We 'll sow it thick enough with graves as green
Or greener certes, than its knowledge-tree.
We 'll have the cypress for the tree of life,
More eminent for shadow: for the rest,
We 'll build it dark with towns and pyramids,
And temples, if it please you: — we 'll have feasts
And funerals also, merrymakes and wars,
Till blood and wine shall mix and run along
Right o'er the edges. And, good Gabriel
(Ye like that word in heaven), *I* too have strength —
Strength to behold Him and not worship Him,
Strength to fall from Him and not cry on Him,
Strength to be in the universe and yet
Neither God nor his servant. The red sign
Burnt on my forehead, which you taunt me with,
Is God's sign that it bows not unto God,
The potter's mark upon his work, to show
It rings well to the striker. I and the earth
Can bear more curse.
Gabriel. O miserable earth,
O ruined angel!
Lucifer. Well, and if it be!
I CHOSE this ruin; I elected it
Of my will, not of service. What I do,
I do volitient, not obedient,

And overtop thy crown with my despair.
My sorrow crowns me. Get thee back to heaven,
And leave me to the earth, which is mine own
In virtue of her ruin, as I hers
In virtue of my revolt! Turn thou from both
That bright, impassive, passive angelhood,
And spare to read us backward any more
Of the spent hallelujahs!
Gabriel. Spirit of scorn,
I might say, of unreason! I might say,
That who despairs, acts; that who acts, connives
With God's relations set in time and space;
That who elects, assumes a something good
Which God made possible; that who lives, obeys
The law of a Life-maker . . .
Lucifer. Let it pass!
No more, thou Gabriel! What if I stand up
And strike my brow against the crystalline
Roofing the creatures, — shall I say, for that,
My stature is too high for me to stand, —
Henceforward I must sit? Sit *thou!*
Gabriel. I kneel.
Lucifer. A heavenly answer. Get thee to thy heaven,
And leave my earth to me!
Gabriel. Through heaven and earth
God's will moves freely, and I follow it,
As color follows light. He overflows
The firmamental walls with deity,
Therefore with love; his lightnings go abroad,
His pity may do so, his angels must,
Whene'er He gives them charges.
Lucifer. Verily,
I and my demons, who are spirits of scorn,
Might hold this charge of standing with a sword
'Twixt man and his inheritance, as well
As the benignest angel of you all.
Gabriel. Thou speakest in the shadow of thy change.
If thou hadst gazed upon the face of God
This morning for a moment, thou hadst known
That only pity fitly can chastise:
Hate but avenges.
Lucifer. As it is, I know
Something of pity. When I reeled in heaven,
And my sword grew too heavy for my grasp,
Stabbing through matter, which it could not pierce
So much as the first shell of, — toward the throne;
When I fell back, down, — staring up as I fell, —
The lightnings holding open my scathed lids,
And that thought of the infinite of God,
Hurled after to precipitate descent;
When countless angel faces still and stern
Pressed out upon me from the level heavens
Adown the abysmal spaces, and I fell
Trampled down by your stillness, and struck blind
By the sight within your eyes, — 't was then I knew
How ye could pity, my kind angelhood!
Gabriel. Alas, discrowned one, by the truth in me
Which God keeps in me, I would give away
All — save that truth and his love keeping it —
To lead thee home again into the light
And hear thy voice chant with the morning stars,
When their rays tremble round them with much song
Sung in more gladness!
Lucifer. Sing, my Morning Star!
Last beautiful, last heavenly, that I loved!
If I could drench thy golden locks with tears,
What were it to this angel?
Gabriel. What love is.
And now I have named God.
Lucifer. Yet, Gabriel,
By the lie in me which I keep myself,
Thou 'rt a false swearer. Were it otherwise,
What dost thou here, vouchsafing tender thoughts
To that earth-angel or earth-demon — which,

Thou and I have not solved the problem yet
Enough to argue, — that fallen Adam there, —
That red-clay and a breath, — who must, forsooth,
Live in a new apocalypse of sense,
With beauty and music waving in his trees
And running in his rivers, to make glad
His soul made perfect? — is it not for hope,
A hope within thee deeper than thy truth,
Of finally conducting him and his
To fill the vacant thrones of me and mine,
Which affront heaven with their vacuity?
Gabriel. Angel, there are no vacant thrones in heaven
To suit thy empty words. Glory and life
Fulfil their own depletions; and if God
Sighed you far from Him, his next breath drew in
A compensative splendor up the vast,
Flushing the starry arteries.
Lucifer. What a change!
So, let the vacant thrones and gardens too
Fill as may please you! — and be pitiful,
As ye translate that word, to the dethroned
And exiled, man or angel. The fact stands,
That I, the rebel, the cast out and down,
Am here and will not go; while there, along
The light to which ye flash the desert out,
Flies your adopted Adam, your red-clay
In two kinds, both being flawed. Why, what is this?
Whose work is this? Whose hand was in the work?
Against whose hand? In this last strife, methinks,
I am not a fallen angel!
Gabriel. Dost thou know
Aught of those exiles?
Lucifer. Ay: I know they have fled
Silent all day along the wilderness:
I know they wear, for burden on their backs,
The thought of a shut gate of Paradise,
And faces of the marshalled cherubim
Shining against, not for them; and I know
They dare not look in one another's face, —
As if each were a cherub!
Gabriel. Dost thou know
Aught of their future?
Lucifer. Only as much as this:
That evil will increase and multiply
Without a benediction.
Gabriel. Nothing more?
Lucifer. Why so the angels taunt! What should be more?
Gabriel. God is more.
Lucifer. Proving what?
Gabriel. That he is God,
And capable of saving. Lucifer,
I charge thee by the solitude He kept
Ere He created, — leave the earth to God!
Lucifer. My foot is on the earth, firm as my sin.
Gabriel. I charge thee by the memory of heaven
Ere any sin was done, — leave earth to God!
Lucifer. My sin is on the earth, to reign thereon.
Gabriel. I charge thee by the choral song we sang,
When up against the white shore of our feet
The depths of the creation swelled and brake, —
And the new worlds, the beaded foam and flower
Of all that coil, roared outward into space
On thunder-edges, — leave the earth to God!
Lucifer. My woe is on the earth, to curse thereby.
Gabriel. I charge thee by that mournful Morning Star
Which trembles . . .
Lucifer. Enough spoken. As the pine
In norland forest drops its weight of snows
By a night's growth, so, growing toward my ends
I drop thy counsels. Farewell, Gabriel!
Watch out thy service; I achieve my will.
And peradventure in the after years,
When thoughtful men shall bend their spacious brows
Upon the storm and strife seen everywhere
To ruffle their smooth manhood and break up
With lurid lights of intermittent hope
Their human fear and wrong, — they may discern
The heart of a lost angel in the earth.

CHORUS OF EDEN SPIRITS

(*Chanting from Paradise, while* ADAM *and* EVE *fly across the Sword-glare.*)

Hearken, oh hearken! let your souls behind you
Turn, gently moved!
Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,
O lost, beloved!
Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled angels,
They press and pierce:
Our requiems follow fast on our evangels, —
Voice throbs in verse.
We are but orphaned spirits left in Eden
A time ago:
God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden
To feed you so.
But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,
No work to do,
The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining
The whole earth through.
Most ineradicable stains, for showing
(Not interfused!)
That brighter colors were the world's foregoing,
Than shall be used.
Hearken, oh hearken! ye shall hearken surely
For years and years,
The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,
Of spirits' tears.
The yearning to a beautiful denied you
Shall strain your powers;
Ideal sweetnesses shall overglide you,
Resumed from ours.
In all your music, our pathetic minor
Your ears shall cross;
And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,
With sense of loss.
We shall be near you in your poet-languors
And wild extremes,
What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,
Or mock with dreams.
And when upon you, weary after roaming,
Death's seal is put,
By the foregone ye shall discern the coming,
Through eyelids shut.

Spirits of the Trees.
Hark! the Eden trees are stirring,
Soft and solemn in your hearing!
Oak and linden, palm and fir,
Tamarisk and juniper,
Each still throbbing in vibration
Since that crowning of creation
When the God-breath spake abroad,
Let us make man like to God!
And the pine stood quivering
As the awful word went by,
Like a vibrant music-string
Stretched from mountain-peak to sky;
And the platan did expand
Slow and gradual, branch and head;
And the cedar's strong black shade
Fluttered brokenly and grand:
Grove and wood were swept aslant
In emotion jubilant.

Voice of the same, but softer.
Which divine impulsion cleaves
In dim movements to the leaves
Dropt and lifted, dropt and lifted,
In the sunlight greenly sifted, —
In the sunlight and the moonlight
Greenly sifted through the trees.
Ever wave the Eden trees
In the nightlight and the noonlight,
With a ruffling of green branches
Shaded off to resonances,
Never stirred by rain or breeze.
Fare ye well, farewell!
The sylvan sounds, no longer audible,
Expire at Eden's door.
Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some murmur which ye heard before.
Farewell! the trees of Eden
Ye shall hear nevermore.

River Spirits.
Hark! the flow of the four rivers —
Hark the flow!
How the silence round you shivers,
While our voices through it go,
Cold and clear.

A softer Voice.
Think a little, while ye near
Of the banks

Where the willows and the deer
Crowd in intermingled ranks,
As if all would drink at once
Where the living water runs ! —
Of the fishes' golden edges
Flashing in and out the sedges;
Of the swans on silver thrones,
Floating down the winding streams
With impassive eyes turned shoreward
And a chant of undertones, —
And the lotos leaning forward
To help them into dreams !
Fare ye well, farewell !
The river-sounds, no longer audible,
Expire at Eden's door.
Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some murmur which ye heard before.
Farewell ! the streams of Eden
Ye shall hear nevermore.

Bird Spirit.
I am the nearest nightingale
That singeth in Eden after you;
And I am singing loud and true,
And sweet, — I do not fail.
I sit upon a cypress bough,
Close to the gate, and I fling my song
Over the gate and through the mail
Of the warden angels marshalled strong, —
Over the gate and after you.
And the warden angels let it pass,
Because the poor brown bird, alas,
Sings in the garden, sweet and true.
And I build my song of high pure notes,
Note over note, height over height,
Till I strike the arch of the Infinite,
And I bridge abysmal agonies
With strong, clear calms of harmonies, —
And something abides, and something floats,
In the song which I sing after you.
Fare ye well, farewell !
The creature-sounds, no longer audible,
Expire at Eden's door.
Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some cadence which ye heard before.
Farewell ! the birds of Eden
Ye shall hear nevermore.

Flower Spirits.
We linger, we linger,
The last of the throng,
Like the tones of a singer
Who loves his own song.
We are spirit-aromas
Of blossom and bloom.
We call your thoughts home, — as
Ye breathe our perfume, —
To the amaranth's splendor
Afire on the slopes;
To the lily-bells tender,
And gray heliotropes;
To the poppy-plains keeping
Such dream-breath and blee
That the angels there stepping
Grew whiter to see:
To the nook, set with moly,
Ye jested one day in,
Till your smile waxed too holy
And left your lips praying:
To the rose in the bower-place,
That dripped o'er you sleeping;
To the asphodel flower-place,
Ye walked ankle-deep in.
We pluck at your raiment,
We stroke down your hair,
We faint in our lament
And pine into air.
Fare ye well, farewell !
The Eden scents, no longer sensible,
Expire at Eden's door.
Each footstep of your treading
Treads out some fragrance which ye knew before.
Farewell ! the flowers of Eden
Ye shall smell nevermore.

[*There is silence.* ADAM *and* EVE *fly on, and never look back. Only a colossal shadow, as of the dark* Angel *passing quickly, is cast upon the Sword-glare.*

SCENE. — *The extremity of the Sword-glare.*

Adam. Pausing a moment on this outer edge
Where the supernal sword-glare cuts in light
The dark exterior desert, — hast thou strength,
Beloved, to look behind us to the gate ?
Eve. Have I not strength to look up to thy face ?
Adam. We need be strong: yon spectacle of cloud
Which seals the gate up to the final doom,
Is God's seal manifest. There seem to lie

A hundred thunders in it, dark and dead;
The unmolten lightnings vein it motionless;
And, outward from its depth, the self-moved sword
Swings slow its awful gnomon of red fire
From side to side, in pendulous horror slow,
Across the stagnant ghastly glare thrown flat
On the intermediate ground from that to this.
The angelic hosts, the archangelic pomps,
Thrones, dominations, princedoms, rank on rank,
Rising sublimely to the feet of God,
On either side and overhead the gate,
Show like a glittering and sustainèd smoke
Drawn to an apex. That their faces shine
Betwixt the solemn clasping of their wings
Clasped high to a silver point above their heads, —
We only guess from hence, and not discern.
Eve. Though we were near enough to see them shine,
The shadow on thy face were awfuller,
To me, at least, — to me — than all their light.
Adam. What is this, Eve ? thou droppest heavily
In a heap earthward, and thy body heaves
Under the golden floodings of thine hair !
Eve. O Adam, Adam ! by that name of Eve —
Thine Eve, thy life — which suits me little now,
Seeing that I now confess myself thy death
And thine undoer, as the snake was mine, —
I do adjure thee, put me straight away,
Together with my name ! Sweet, punish me !
O Love, be just ! and, ere we pass beyond
The light cast outward by the fiery sword,
Into the dark which earth must be to us,
Bruise my head with thy foot, — as the curse said
My seed shall the first tempter's ! strike with curse,
As God struck in the garden ! and as He,
Being satisfied with justice and with wrath,
Did roll his thunder gentler at the close, —
Thou, peradventure, mayst at last recoil
To some soft need of mercy. Strike, my lord !
I, also, after tempting, writhe on the ground,
And I would feed on ashes from thine hand,
As suits me, O my tempted !
Adam. My beloved,
Mine Eve and life — I have no other name
For thee or for the sun than what ye are,
My utter life and light ! If we have fallen,
It is that we have sinned, — we: God is just;
And, since his curse doth comprehend us both,
It must be that his balance holds the weights
Of first and last sin on a level. What !
Shall I who had not virtue to stand straight
Among the hills of Eden, here assume
To mend the justice of the perfect God,
By piling up a curse upon his curse,
Against thee — thee ?
Eve. For so, perchance, thy God
Might take thee into grace for scorning me;
Thy wrath against the sinner giving proof
Of inward abrogation of the sin:
And so, the blessèd angels might come down
And walk with thee as erst, — I think they would, —
Because I was not near to make them sad
Or soil the rustling of their innocence.
Adam. They know me. I am deepest in the guilt,
If last in the transgression.
Eve. Thou !
Adam. If God,
Who gave the right and joyaunce of the world
Both unto thee and me, — gave thee to me,
The best gift last, the last sin was the worst,
Which sinned against more complement of gifts
And grace of giving. God ! I render back
Strong benediction and perpetual praise
From mortal feeble lips (as incense-smoke,
Out of a little censer, may fill heaven),
That thou, in striking my benumbèd hands
And forcing them to drop all other boons
Of beauty and dominion and delight, —
Hast left this well-belovèd Eve, this life
Within life, this best gift between their palms,
In gracious compensation !

Eve. Is it thy voice ?
Or some saluting angel's — calling home
My feet into the garden ?
Adam. O my God !
I, standing here between the glory and dark, —
The glory of thy wrath projected forth
From Eden's wall, the dark of our distress
Which settles a step off in that drear world —
Lift up to Thee the hands from whence hath fallen
Only creation's sceptre, — thanking Thee
That rather Thou hast cast me out with *her*
Than left me lorn of her in Paradise,
With angel looks and angel songs around
To show the absence of her eyes and voice,
And make society full desertness
Without her use in comfort!
Eve. Where is loss ?
Am I in Eden ? can another speak
Mine own love's tongue ?
Adam. Because with *her*, I stand
Upright, as far as can be in this fall,
And look away from heaven which doth accuse,
And look away from earth which doth convict,
Into her face, and crown my discrowned brow
Out of her love, and put the thought of her
Around me, for an Eden full of birds,
And lift her body up — thus — to my heart,
And with my lips upon her lips, — thus, thus, —
Do quicken and sublimate my mortal breath
Which cannot climb against the grave's steep sides
But overtops this grief.
Eve. I am renewed.
My eyes grow with the light which is in thine;
The silence of my heart is full of sound.
Hold me up — so ! Because I comprehend
This human love, I shall not be afraid
Of any human death; and yet because
I know this strength of love, I seem to know
Death's strength by that same sign. Kiss on my lips,
To shut the door close on my rising soul, —
Lest it pass outwards in astonishment
And leave thee lonely !
Adam. Yet thou liest, Eve,
Bent heavily on thyself across mine arm,
Thy face flat to the sky.
Eve. Ay, and the tears
Running, as it might seem, my life from me,
They run so fast and warm. Let me lie so,
And weep so, as if in a dream or prayer,
Unfastening, clasp by clasp, the hard tight thought
Which clipped my heart and showed me evermore
Loathed of thy justice as I loathe the snake,
And as the pure ones loathe our sin. To-day,
All day, belovèd, as we fled across
This desolating radiance cast by swords
Not suns, — my lips prayed soundless to myself,
Striking against each other — 'O Lord God !'
('T was so I prayed) 'I ask Thee by my sin,
And by thy curse, and by thy blameless heavens,
Make dreadful haste to hide me from thy face
And from the face of my belovèd here
For whom I am no helpmeet, quick away
Into the new dark mystery of death !
I will lie still there, I will make no plaint,
I will not sigh, nor sob, nor speak a word,
Nor struggle to come back beneath the sun
Where peradventure I might sin anew
Against thy mercy and his pleasure Death,
O death, whate'er it be, is good enough
For such as I am: while for Adam here,
No voice shall say again, in heaven or earth,
It is not good for him to be alone.'
Adam. And was it good for such a prayer to pass,
My unkind Eve, betwixt our mutual lives ?
If I am exiled, must I be bereaved ?
Eve. 'T was an ill prayer: it shall be prayed no more;
And God did use it like a foolishness,
Giving no answer. Now my heart has grown

Too high and strong for such a foolish prayer;
Love makes it strong: and since I was the first
In the transgression, with a steady foot
I will be first to tread from this sword-glare
Into the outer darkness of the waste, —
And thus I do it.
Adam. Thus I follow thee,
As erewhile in the sin. — What sounds! what sounds!
I feel a music which comes straight from heaven,
As tender as a watering dew.
Eve. I think
That angels — not those guarding Paradise, —
But the love-angels, who came erst to us,
And when we said 'GOD,' fainted unawares
Back from our mortal presence unto God,
(As if He drew them inward in a breath)
His name being heard of them, — I think that they
With sliding voices lean from heavenly towers,
Invisible but gracious. Hark — how soft!

CHORUS OF INVISIBLE ANGELS

Faint and tender.

Mortal man and woman,
Go upon your travel!
Heaven assist the human
Smoothly to unravel
All that web of pain
Wherein ye are holden.
Do ye know our voices
Chanting down the Golden?
Do ye guess our choice is,
Being unbeholden,
To be hearkened by you yet again?

This pure door of opal
God hath shut between us, —
Us, his shining people,
You, who once have seen us
And are blinded new!
Yet, across the doorway,
Past the silence reaching,
Farewells evermore may,
Blessing in the teaching,
Glide from us to you.

First Semichorus.
Think how erst your Eden,
Day on day succeeding,
With our presence glowed.
We came as if the Heavens were bowed
To a milder music rare.
Ye saw us in our solemn treading,
Treading down the steps of cloud,
While our wings, outspreading
Double calms of whiteness,
Dropped superfluous brightness
Down from stair to stair.
Second Semichorus.
Or oft, abrupt though tender,
While ye gazed on space,
We flashed our angel-splendor
In either human face.
With mystic lilies in our hands,
From the atmospheric bands
Breaking with a sudden grace,
We took you unaware!
While our feet struck glories
Outward, smooth and fair,
Which we stood on floorwise,
Platformed in mid-air.
First Semichorus.
Or oft, when Heaven-descended,
Stood we in our wondering sight
In a mute apocalypse
With dumb vibrations on our lips
From hosannas ended,
And grand half-vanishings
Of the empyreal things
Within our eyes belated,
Till the heavenly Infinite
Falling off from the Created,
Left our inward contemplation
Opened into ministration.
Chorus.
Then upon our axle turning
Of great joy to sympathy,
We sang out the morning
Broadening up the sky.
Or we drew
Our music through
The noontide's hush and heat and shine,
Informed with our intense Divine:
Interrupted vital notes
Palpitating hither, thither,
Burning out into the æther,
Sensible like fiery motes.
Or, whenever twilight drifted
Through the cedar masses,
The globèd sun we lifted,
Trailing purple, trailing gold

Out between the passes
Of the mountains manifold,
To anthems slowly sung:
While he, — aweary, half in swoon
For joy to hear our climbing tune
Transpierce the stars' concentric rings, —
The burden of his glory flung
In broken lights upon our wings.
[*The chant dies away confusedly, and* LUCIFER *appears.*

Lucifer. Now may all fruits be pleasant to thy lips,
Beautiful Eve! The times have somewhat changed
Since thou and I had talk beneath a tree,
Albeit ye are not gods yet.

Eve. Adam! hold
My right hand strongly! It is Lucifer —
And we have love to lose.

Adam. I' the name of God,
Go apart from us, O thou Lucifer!
And leave us to the desert thou hast made
Out of thy treason. Bring no serpent-slime
Athwart this path kept holy to our tears!
Or we may curse thee with their bitterness.

Lucifer. Curse freely! curses thicken. Why, this Eve
Who thought me once part worthy of her ear
And somewhat wiser than the other beasts, —
Drawing together her large globes of eyes,
The light of which is throbbing in and out
Their steadfast continuity of gaze, —
Knots her fair eyebrows in so hard a knot,
And down from her white heights of womanhood
Looks on me so amazed, — I scarce should fear
To wager such an apple as she plucked
Against one riper from the tree of life,
That she could curse too — as a woman may —
Smooth in the vowels.

Eve. So — speak wickedly!
I like it best so. Let thy words be wounds, —
For, so, I shall not fear thy power to hurt.
Trench on the forms of good by open ill —
For, so, I shall wax strong and grand with scorn,
Scorning myself for ever trusting thee
As far as thinking, ere a snake ate dust,
He could speak wisdom.

Lucifer. Our new gods, it seems
Deal more in thunders than in courtesies.
And, sooth, mine own Olympus, which anon
I shall build up to loud-voiced imagery
From all the wandering visions of the world,
May show worse railing than our lady Eve
Pours o'er the rounding of her argent arm.
But why should this be? Adam pardoned Eve.

Adam. Adam loved Eve. Jehovah pardoned both!

Eve. Adam forgave Eve — because loving Eve.

Lucifer. So, well. Yet Adam was undone of Eve,
As both were by the snake. Therefore forgive,
In like wise, fellow-temptress, the poor snake —
Who stung there, not so poorly! [*Aside.*

Eve. Hold thy wrath,
Belovèd Adam! let me answer him;
For this time he speaks truth, which we should hear,
And asks for mercy, which I most should grant,
In like wise, as he tells us — in like wise!
And therefore I thee pardon, Lucifer,
As freely as the streams of Eden flowed
When we were happy by them. So, depart;
Leave us to walk the remnant of our time
Out mildly in the desert. Do not seek
To harm us any more or scoff at us,
Or ere the dust be laid upon our face,
To find there the communion of the dust
And issue of the dust. — Go!

Adam. At once, go!

Lucifer. Forgive! and go! Ye images of clay,
Shrunk somewhat in the mould, — what jest is this?
What words are these to use? By what a thought
Conceive ye of me? Yesterday — a snake!
To-day — what?

Adam. A strong spirit.

Eve. A sad spirit.

Adam. Perhaps a fallen angel. — Who shall say!

Lucifer. Who told thee, Adam?

Adam. Thou! The prodigy
Of thy vast brows and melancholy eyes

Which comprehend the heights of some great fall.
I think that thou hast one day worn a crown
Under the eyes of God.
Lucifer. And why of God?
Adam. It were no crown else. Verily, I think
Thou 'rt fallen far. I had not yesterday
Said it so surely, but I know to-day
Grief by grief, sin by sin.
Lucifer. A crown, by a crown.
Adam. Ay, mock me! now I know more than I knew:
Now I know that thou art fallen below hope
Of final re-ascent.
Lucifer. Because?
Adam. Because
A spirit who expected to see God
Though at the last point of a million years,
Could dare no mockery of a ruined man
Such as this Adam.
Lucifer. Who is high and bold —
Be it said passing! — of a good red clay
Discovered on some top of Lebanon,
Or haply of Aornus, beyond sweep
Of the black eagle's wing! A furlong lower
Had made a meeker king for Eden. Soh!
Is it not possible, by sin and grief
(To give the things your names) that spirits should rise
Instead of falling?
Adam. Most impossible.
The Highest being the Holy and the Glad,
Whoever rises must approach delight
And sanctity in the act.
Lucifer. Ha, my clay-king!
Thou wilt not rule by wisdom very long
The after generations. Earth, methinks,
Will disinherit thy philosophy
For a new doctrine suited to thine heirs,
And class these present dogmas with the rest
Of the old-world traditions, Eden fruits
And Saurian fossils.
Eve. Speak no more with him,
Beloved! it is not good to speak with him.
Go from us, Lucifer, and speak no more!
We have no pardon which thou dost not scorn,
Nor any bliss, thou seest, for coveting,
Nor innocence for staining. Being bereft,
We would be alone. — Go!
Lucifer. Ah! ye talk the same,
All of you — spirits and clay — go, and depart!
In Heaven they said so, and at Eden's gate,
And here, reiterant, in the wilderness.
None saith, Stay with me, for thy face is fair!
None saith, Stay with me, for thy voice is sweet!
And yet I was not fashioned out of clay.
Look on me, woman! Am I beautiful?
Eve. Thou hast a glorious darkness.
Lucifer. Nothing more?
Eve. I think, no more.
Lucifer. False Heart — thou thinkest more!
Thou canst not choose but think, as I praise God,
Unwillingly but fully, that I stand
Most absolute in beauty. As yourselves
Were fashioned very good at best, so *we*
Sprang very beauteous from the creant Word
Which thrilled behind us, God himself being moved
When that august work of a perfect shape,
His dignities of sovran angelhood,
Swept out into the universe, — divine
With thunderous movements, earnest looks of gods,
And silver-solemn clash of cymbal wings.
Whereof was I, in motion and in form,
A part not poorest. And yet, — yet, perhaps,
This beauty which I speak of, is not here,
As God's voice is not here, nor even my crown —
I do not know. What is this thought or thing
Which I call beauty? Is it thought, or thing?
Is it a thought accepted for a thing?
Or both? or neither? — a pretext — a word?
Its meaning flutters in me like a flame
Under my own breath: my perceptions reel
For evermore around it, and fall off,
As if it too were holy.
Eve. Which it is.
Adam. The essence of all beauty, I call love.
The attribute, the evidence, and end,
The consummation to the inward sense,
Of beauty apprehended from without,
I still call love. As form, when colorless,

Is nothing to the eye, — that pine-tree there,
Without its black and green, being all a blank, —
So, without love, is beauty undiscerned
In man or angel. Angel ! rather ask
What love is in thee, what love moves to thee,
And what collateral love moves on with thee;
Then shalt thou know if thou art beautiful.
Lucifer. Love ! what is love ? I lose it. Beauty and love
I darken to the image. Beauty — love !
[*He fades away, while a low music sounds.*
Adam. Thou art pale, Eve.
Eve. The precipice of ill
Down this colossal nature, dizzies me:
And, hark ! the starry harmony remote
Seems measuring the heights from whence he fell.
Adam. Think that we have not fallen so ! By the hope
And aspiration, by the love and faith,
We do exceed the stature of this angel.
Eve. Happier we are than he is, by the death.
Adam. Or rather, by the life of the Lord God !
How dim the angel grows, as if that blast
Of music swept him back into the dark.
[*The music is stronger, gathering itself into uncertain articulation.*
Eve. It throbs in on us like a plaintive heart,
Pressing, with slow pulsations, vibrative,
Its gradual sweetness through the yielding air,
To such expression as the stars may use,
Most starry-sweet and strange ! With every note
That grows more loud, the angel grows more dim,
Receding in proportion to approach,
Until he stand afar, — a shade.
Adam. Now, words.

SONG OF THE MORNING STAR TO LUCIFER

He fades utterly away and vanishes, as it proceeds.

Mine orbèd image sinks
Back from thee, back from thee,
As thou art fallen, methinks,
Back from me, back from me.
O my light-bearer,
Could another fairer
Lack to thee, lack to thee ?
Ah, ah, Heosphoros !
I loved thee with the fiery love of stars
Who love by burning, and by loving move,
Too near the throned Jehovah not to love.
Ah, ah, Heosphoros !
Their brows flash fast on me from gliding cars,
Pale-passioned for my loss.
Ah, ah, Heosphoros !

Mine orbèd heats drop cold
Down from thee, down from thee,
As fell thy grace of old
Down from me, down from me.
O my light-bearer,
Is another fairer
Won to thee, won to thee ?
Ah, ah, Heosphoros,
Great love preceded loss,
Known to thee, known to thee.
Ah, ah !
Thou, breathing thy communicable grace
Of life into my light,
Mine astral faces, from thine angel face,
Hast inly fed,
And flooded me with radiance overmuch
From thy pure height.
Ah, ah !
Thou, with calm, floating pinions both ways spread,
Erect, irradiated,
Didst sting my wheel of glory
On, on before thee
Along the Godlight by a quickening touch !
Ha, ha !
Around, around the firmamental ocean
I swam expanding with delirious fire !
Around, around, around, in blind desire
To be drawn upward to the Infinite —
Ha, ha !

Until, the motion flinging out the motion
To a keen whirl of passion and avidity,
To a dim whirl of languor and delight,
I wound in gyrant orbits smooth and white
With that intense rapidity.
Around, around,
I wound and interwound,
While all the cyclic heavens about me spun.

Stars, planets, suns, and moons dilated broad,
Then flashed together into a single sun,
And wound, and wound in one:
And as they wound I wound, — around, around,
In a great fire I almost took for God.
Ha, ha, Heosphoros!

Thine angel glory sinks
Down from me, down from me —
My beauty falls, methinks,
Down from thee, down from thee!
O my light-bearer,
O my path-preparer,
Gone from me, gone from me!
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!
I cannot kindle underneath the brow
Of this new angel here, who is not thou.
All things are altered since that time ago, —
And if I shine at eve, I shall not know.
I am strange — I am slow.
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!
Henceforward, human eyes of lovers be
The only sweetest sight that I shall see,
With tears between the looks raised up to me.
Ah, ah!
When, having wept all night, at break of day
Above the folded hills they shall survey
My light, a little trembling, in the gray.
Ah, ah!
And gazing on me, such shall comprehend,
Through all my piteous pomp at morn or even,
And melancholy leaning out of heaven,
That love, their own divine, may change or end,
That love may close in loss!
Ah, ah, Heosphoros!

SCENE. — *Farther on. A wild open country seen vaguely in the approaching night.*

Adam. How doth the wide and melancholy earth
Gather her hills around us, gray and ghast,
And stare with blank significance of loss
Right in our faces! Is the wind up?
Eve. Nay.
Adam. And yet the cedars and the junipers
Rock slowly through the mist, without a sound,
And shapes which have no certainty of shape
Drift duskly in and out between the pines,
And loom along the edges of the hills,
And lie flat, curdling in the open ground —
Shadows without a body, which contract
And lengthen as we gaze on them.
Eve. O life
Which is not man's nor angel's! What is this?
Adam. No cause for fear. The circle of God's life
Contains all life beside.
Eve. I think the earth
Is crazed with curse, and wanders from the sense
Of those first laws affixed to form and space
Or ever she knew sin.
Adam. We will not fear:
We were brave sinning.
Eve. Yea, I plucked the fruit
With eyes upturned to heaven and seeing there
Our god-thrones, as the tempter said, — not GOD.
My heart, which beat then, sinks. The sun hath sunk
Out of sight with our Eden.
Adam. Night is near.
Eve. And God's curse, nearest. Let us travel back
And stand within the sword-glare till we die,
Believing it is better to meet death
Than suffer desolation.
Adam. Nay, beloved!
We must not pluck death from the Maker's hand,
As erst we plucked the apple: we must wait
Until He gives death as he gave us life,
Nor murmur faintly o'er the primal gift
Because we spoilt its sweetness with our sin.
Eve. Ah, ah! dost thou discern what I behold?
Adam. I see all. How the spirits in thine eyes

From their dilated orbits bound before
To meet the spectral Dread!
Eve. I am afraid —
Ah, ah! the twilight bristles wild with shapes
Of intermittent motion, aspect vague
And mystic bearings, which o'ercreep the earth,
Keeping slow time with horrors in the blood.
How near they reach . . . and far! How gray they move —
Treading upon the darkness without feet,
And fluttering on the darkness without wings!
Some run like dogs, with noses to the ground;
Some keep one path, like sheep; some rock like trees;
Some glide like a fallen leaf; and some flow on
Copious as rivers.
Adam. Some spring up like fire:
And some coil . . .
Eve. Ah, ah! dost thou pause to say
Like what? — coil like the serpent, when he fell
From all the emerald splendor of his height
And writhed, and could not climb against the curse,
Not a ring's length. I am afraid — afraid —
I think it is God's will to make me afraid, —
Permitting THESE to haunt us in the place
Of his belovèd angels — gone from us
Because we are not pure. Dear Pity of God,
That didst permit the angels to go home
And live no more with us who are not pure,
Save *us* too from a loathly company —
Almost as loathly in our eyes, perhaps,
As *we* are in the purest! Pity us —
Us too! nor shut us in the dark, away
From verity and from stability,
Or what we name such through the precedence
Of earth's adjusted uses, — leave us not
To doubt betwixt our senses and our souls,
Which are the more distraught and full of pain
And weak of apprehension!
Adam Courage, Sweet!
The mystic shapes ebb back from us, and drop
With slow concentric movement, each on each, —
Expressing wider spaces, — and collapsed
In lines more definite for imagery
And clearer for relation, till the throng
Of shapeless spectra merge into a few
Distinguishable phantasms vague and grand
Which sweep out and around us vastily
And hold us in a circle and a calm.
Eve. Strange phantasms of pale shadow! there are twelve.
Thou who didst name all lives, hast names for these?
Adam. Methinks this is the zodiac of the earth,
Which rounds us with a visionary dread,
Responding with twelve shadowy signs of earth,
In fantasque opposition and approach,
To those celestial, constellated twelve
Which palpitate adown the silent nights
Under the pressure of the hand of God
Stretched wide in benediction. At this hour,
Not a star pricketh the flat gloom of heaven:
But, girdling close our nether wilderness,
The zodiac-figures of the earth loom slow, —
Drawn out, as suiteth with the place and time,
In twelve colossal shades instead of stars,
Through which the ecliptic line of mystery
Strikes bleakly with an unrelenting scope,
Foreshowing life and death.
Eve. By dream or sense,
Do we see this?
Adam. Our spirits have climbed high
By reason of the passion of our grief,
And, from the top of sense, looked over sense
To the significance and heart of things
Rather than things themselves.
Eve. And the dim twelve . . .
Adam. Are dim exponents of the creature-life
As earth contains it. Gaze on them, beloved!
By stricter apprehension of the sight,
Suggestions of the creatures shall assuage
The terror of the shadows, — what is known

Subduing the unknown and taming it
From all prodigious dread. That phantasm, there,
Presents a lion, albeit twenty times
As large as any lion — with a roar
Set soundless in his vibratory jaws,
And a strange horror stirring in his mane.
And, there, a pendulous shadow seems to weigh —
Good against ill, perchance; and there, a crab
Puts coldly out its gradual shadow-claws,
Like a slow blot that spreads, — till all the ground,
Crawled over by it, seems to crawl itself.
A bull stands hornèd here with gibbous glooms;
And a ram likewise: and a scorpion writhes
Its tail in ghastly slime and stings the dark.
This way a goat leaps with wild blank of beard;
And here, fantastic fishes duskly float,
Using the calm for waters, while their fins
Throb out quick rhythms along the shallow air.
While images more human —
Eve. How he stands,
That phantasm of a man — who is not *thou!*
Two phantasms of two men!
Adam. One that sustains,
And one that strives, — resuming, so, the ends
Of manhood's curse of labor. Dost thou see
That phantasm of a woman?
Eve. I have seen;
But look off to those small humanities
Which draw me tenderly across my fear, —
Lesser and fainter than my womanhood,
Or yet thy manhood — with strange innocence
Set in the misty lines of head and hand.
They lean together! I would gaze on them
Longer and longer, till my watching eyes,
As the stars do in watching anything,
Should light them forward from their outline vague
To clear configuration.
[*Two* Spirits, *of Organic and Inorganic Nature, arise from the ground.*
But what Shapes
Rise up between us in the open space,
And thrust me into horror, back from hope!
Adam. Colossal Shapes — twin sovran images,
With a disconsolate, blank majesty
Set in their wondrous faces! with no look,
And yet an aspect — a significance
Of individual life and passionate ends,
Which overcomes us gazing.
O bleak sound,
O shadow of sound, O phantasm of thin sound!
How it comes, wheeling as the pale moth wheels,
Wheeling and wheeling in continuous wail
Around the cyclic zodiac, and gains force,
And gathers, settling coldly like a moth,
On the wan faces of these images
We see before us, — whereby modified,
It draws a straight line of articulate song
From out that spiral faintness of lament,
And, by one voice, expresses many griefs.
First Spirit.
I am the spirit of the harmless earth.
God spake me softly out among the stars,
As softly as a blessing of much worth;
And then his smile did follow unawares,
That all things fashioned so for use and duty
Might shine anointed with his chrism of beauty —
Yet I wail!
I drave on with the worlds exultingly,
Obliquely down the Godlight's gradual fall;
Individual aspect and complexity
Of gyratory orb and interval
Lost in the fluent motion of delight
Toward the high ends of Being beyond sight —
Yet I wail!
Second Spirit.
I am the spirit of the harmless beasts,
Of flying things, and creeping things, and swimming;
Of all the lives, erst set at silent feasts,
That found the love-kiss on the goblet brimming,
And tasted in each drop within the measure
The sweetest pleasure of their Lord's good pleasure —
Yet I wail!

What a full hum of life around his lips
Bore witness to the fulness of creation!
How all the grand words were full-laden ships
Each sailing onward from enunciation
To separate existence, — and each bearing
The creature's power of joying, hoping, fearing!
Yet I wail!
Eve. They wail, beloved! they speak of glory and God,
And they wail — wail. That burden of the song
Drops from it like its fruit, and heavily falls
Into the lap of silence.
Adam. Hark, again!
First Spirit.
I was so beautiful, so beautiful,
My joy stood up within me bold to add
A word to God's, — and, when his work was full,
To 'very good' responded 'very glad!'
Filtered through roses did the light enclose me,
And bunches of the grape swam blue across me —
Yet I wail!
Second Spirit.
I bounded with my panthers: I rejoiced
In my young tumbling lions rolled together:
My stag, the river at his fetlocks, poised
Then dipped his antlers through the golden weather
In the same ripple which the alligator
Left, in his joyous troubling of the water —
Yet I wail!
First Spirit.
O my deep waters, cataract and flood,
What wordless triumph did your voices render!
O mountain-summits, where the angels stood
And shook from head and wing thick dews of splendor!
How, with a holy quiet, did your Earthy
Accept that Heavenly, knowing ye were worthy!
Yet I wail!
Second Spirit.
O my wild wood-dogs, with your listening eyes!
My horses — my ground-eagles, for swift fleeing!
My birds, with viewless wings of harmonies,
My calm cold fishes of a silver being,
How happy were ye, living and possessing,
O fair half-souls capacious of full blessing!
Yet I wail!
First Spirit.
I wail, I wail! Now hear my charge to-day,
Thou man, thou woman, marked as the misdoers
By God's sword at your backs! I lent my clay
To make your bodies, which had grown more flowers:
And now, in change for what I lent, ye give me
The thorn to vex, the tempest-fire to cleave me —
And I wail!
Second Spirit.
I wail, I wail! Behold ye that I fasten
My sorrow's fang upon your souls dishonored?
Accursed transgressors! down the steep ye hasten, —
Your crown's weight on the world, to drag it downward
Unto your ruin. Lo! my lions, scenting
The blood of wars, roar hoarse and unrelenting —
And I wail!
First Spirit.
I wail, I wail! Do you hear that I wail?
I had no part in your transgression — none.
My roses on the bough did bud not pale,
My rivers did not loiter in the sun;
I was obedient. Wherefore in my centre
Do I thrill at this curse of death and winter? —
Do I wail?
Second Spirit.
I wail, I wail! I wail in the assault
Of undeserved perdition, sorely wounded!
My nightingale sang sweet without a fault,
My gentle leopards innocently bounded.
We were obedient. What is this convulses

Our blameless life with pangs and fever pulses ?
And I wail !
Eve. I choose God's thunder and his angels' swords
To die by, Adam, rather than such words.
Let us pass out and flee.
Adam. We cannot flee.
This zodiac of the creatures' cruelty
Curls round us, like a river cold and drear,
And shuts us in, constraining us to hear.
First Spirit.
I feel your steps, O wandering sinners, strike
A sense of death to me, and undug graves !
The heart of earth, once calm, is trembling like
The ragged foam along the ocean-waves:
The restless earthquakes rock against each other;
The elements moan 'round me — 'Mother, mother' —
And I wail !
Second Spirit.
Your melancholy looks do pierce me through;
Corruption swathes the paleness of your beauty.
Why have ye done this thing ? What did we do
That we should fall from bliss as ye from duty ?
Wild shriek the hawks, in waiting for their jesses,
Fierce howl the wolves along the wildernesses —
And I wail !
Adam. To thee, the Spirit of the harmless earth,
To thee, the Spirit of earth's harmless lives,
Inferior creatures but still innocent,
Be salutation from a guilty mouth
Yet worthy of some audience and respect
From you who are not guilty. If we have sinned,
God hath rebuked us, who is over us
To give rebuke or death, and if ye wail
Because of any suffering from our sin,
Ye who are under and not over us,
Be satisfied with God, if not with us,
And pass out from our presence in such peace
As we have left you, to enjoy revenge
Such as the heavens have made you. Verily,
There must be strife between us, large as sin.
Eve. No strife, mine Adam ! Let us not stand high
Upon the wrong we did to reach disdain,
Who rather should be humbler evermore
Since self-made sadder. Adam ! shall I speak
I who spake once to such a bitter end —
Shall I speak humbly now who once was proud ?
I, schooled by sin to more humility
Than thou hast, O mine Adam, O my king —
My king, if not the world's ?
Adam. Speak as thou wilt.
Eve. Thus, then — my hand in thine —
. . . Sweet, dreadful Spirits !
I pray you humbly in the name of God,
Not to say of these tears, which are impure —
Grant me such pardoning grace as can go forth
From clean volitions toward a spotted will,
From the wronged to the wronger, this and no more !
I do not ask more. I am 'ware, indeed,
That absolute pardon is impossible
From you to me, by reason of my sin, —
And that I cannot evermore, as once,
With worthy acceptation of pure joy,
Behold the trances of the holy hills
Beneath the leaning stars, or watch the vales
Dew-pallid with their morning ecstasy, —
Or hear the winds make pastoral peace between
Two grassy uplands, — and the river-wells
Work out their bubbling mysteries underground, —
And all the birds sing, till for joy of song
They lift their trembling wings as if to heave
The too-much weight of music from their heart
And float it up the æther. I am 'ware
That these things I can no more apprehend
With a pure organ into a full delight, —
The sense of beauty and of melody
Being no more aided in me by the sense

Of personal adjustment to those heights
Of what I see well-formed or hear well-tuned,
But rather coupled darkly and made ashamed
By my percipiency of sin and fall
In melancholy of humiliant thoughts.
But, oh ! fair, dreadful Spirits — albeit this
Your accusation must confront my soul,
And your pathetic utterance and full gaze
Must evermore subdue me, — be content !
Conquer me gently — as if pitying me,
Not to say loving ! let my tears fall thick
As watering dews of Eden, unreproached;
And when your tongues reprove me, make me smooth,
Not ruffled — smooth and still with your reproof,
And peradventure better while more sad !
For look to it, sweet Spirits, look well to it,
It will not be amiss in you who kept
The law of your own righteousness, and keep
The right of your own griefs to mourn themselves, —
To pity me twice fallen, from that, and this,
From joy of place, and also right of wail,
'I wail' being not for me — only 'I sin.'
Look to it, O sweet Spirits !
                                        For was I not,
At that last sunset seen in Paradise,
When all the westering clouds flashed out in throngs
Of sudden angel-faces, face by face,
All hushed and solemn, as a thought of God
Held them suspended, — was I not, that hour,
The lady of the world, princess of life,
Mistress of feast and favor ? Could I touch
A rose with my white hand, but it became
Redder at once ? Could I walk leisurely
Along our swarded garden, but the grass
Tracked me with greenness ? Could I stand aside
A moment underneath a cornel-tree,
But all the leaves did tremble as alive
With songs of fifty birds who were made glad
Because I stood there ? Could I turn to look
With these twain eyes of mine, now weeping fast,
Now good for only weeping, — upon man,
Angel, or beast, or bird, but each rejoiced
Because I looked on him ? Alas, alas !
And is not this much woe, to cry 'alas !'
Speaking of joy ? And is not this more shame,
To have made the woe myself, from all that joy ?
To have stretched my hand, and plucked it from the tree,
And chosen it for fruit ? Nay, is not this
Still most despair, — to have halved that bitter fruit,
And ruined, so, the sweetest friend I have,
Turning the GREATEST to mine enemy ?
Adam. I will not hear thee speak so. Hearken, Spirits !
Our God, who is the enemy of none
But only of their sin, hath set your hope
And my hope, in a promise, on this Head.
Show reverence, then, and never bruise her more
With unpermitted and extreme reproach, —
Lest, passionate in anguish, she fling down
Beneath your trampling feet, God's gift to us
Of sovranty by reason and freewill,
Sinning against the province of the Soul
To rule the soulless. Reverence her estate,
And pass out from her presence with no words !
Eve. O dearest Heart, have patience with my heart !
O Spirits, have patience, 'stead of reverence,
And let me speak, for, not being innocent,
It little doth become me to be proud,
And I am prescient by the very hope
And promise set upon me, that henceforth
Only my gentleness shall make me great,
My humbleness exalt me. Awful Spirits,
Be witness that I stand in your reproof
But one sun's length off from my happiness —
Happy, as I have said, to look around,

Clear to look up! — And now! I need not speak —
Ye see me what I am; ye scorn me so,
Because ye see me what I have made myself
From God's best making! Alas, — peace forgone,
Love wronged, and virtue forfeit, and tears wept
Upon all, vainly! Alas, me! alas,
Who have undone myself, from all that best,
Fairest and sweetest, to this wretchedest
Saddest and most defiled — cast out, cast down —
What word metes absolute loss? let absolute loss
Suffice you for revenge. For *I*, who lived
Beneath the wings of angels yesterday,
Wander to-day beneath the roofless world:
I, reigning the earth's empress yesterday,
Put off from me, to-day, your hate with prayers:
I, yesterday, who answered the Lord God,
Composed and glad as singing-birds the sun,
Might shriek now from our dismal desert, 'God,'
And hear him make reply, 'What is thy need,
Thou whom I cursed to-day?'
Adam. Eve!
Eve. *I*, at last,
Who yesterday was helpmate and delight
Unto mine Adam, am to-day the grief
And curse-mete for him. And, so, pity us,
Ye gentle Spirits, and pardon him and me,
And let some tender peace, made of our pain,
Grow up betwixt us, as a tree might grow,
With boughs on both sides! In the shade of which,
When presently ye shall behold us dead, —
For the poor sake of our humility,
Breathe out your pardon on our breathless lips,
And drop your twilight dews against our brows,
And stroking with mild airs our harmless hands
Left empty of all fruit, perceive your love
Distilling through your pity over us,
And suffer it, self-reconciled, to pass!

LUCIFER *rises in the circle.*

Lucifer. Who talks here of a complement of grief?
Of expiation wrought by loss and fall?
Of hate subduable to pity? Eve?
Take counsel from thy counsellor the snake,
And boast no more in grief, nor hope from pain,
My docile Eve! I teach you to despond
Who taught you disobedience. Look around: —
Earth spirits and phantasms hear you talk unmoved,
As if ye were red clay again and talked!
What are your words to them — your grief to them —
Your deaths, indeed, to them? Did the hand pause,
For *their* sake, in the plucking of the fruit,
That they should pause for *you*, in hating you?
Or will your grief or death, as did your sin,
Bring change upon their final doom? Behold,
Your grief is but your sin in the rebound,
And cannot expiate for it.
Adam. That is true.
Lucifer. Ay, that is true. The clay-king testifies
To the snake's counsel, — hear him! — very true.
Earth Spirits. I wail, I wail!
Lucifer. And certes, *that* is true.
Ye wail, ye all wail. Peradventure I
Could wail among you. O thou universe,
That holdest sin and woe, — more room for wail!
Distant Starry Voice. Ah, ah, Heosphoros! Heosphoros!
Adam. Mark Lucifer! He changes awfully.
Eve. It seems as if he looked from grief to God
And could not see him. Wretched Lucifer!
Adam. How he stands — yet an angel!
Earth Spirits. We all wail!
Lucifer (*after a pause*). Dost thou remember, Adam, when the curse
Took us in Eden? On a mountain-peak
Half-sheathed in primal woods and glittering
In spasms of awful sunshine at that hour,

A lion couched, part raised upon his paws,
With his calm massive face turned full on thine,
And his mane listening. When the ended curse
Left silence in the world, right suddenly
He sprang up rampant and stood straight and stiff,
As if the new reality of death
Were dashed against his eyes, and roared so fierce,
(Such thick carnivorous passion in his throat
Tearing a passage through the wrath and fear)
And roared so wild, and smote from all the hills
Such fast keen echoes crumbling down the vales
Precipitately, — that the forest beasts,
One after one, did mutter a response
Of savage and of sorrowful complaint
Which trailed along the gorges. Then, at once,
He fell back, and rolled crashing from the height
Into the dusk of pines.
Adam. It might have been.
I heard the curse alone.
Earth Spirits. I wail, I wail!
Lucifer. That lion is the type of what I am.
And as he fixed thee with his full-faced hate,
And roared, O Adam, comprehending doom,
So, gazing on the face of the Unseen,
I cry out here between the Heavens and Earth
My conscience of this sin, this woe, this wrath,
Which damn me to this depth.
Earth Spirits. I wail, I wail!
Eve. I wail — O God!
Lucifer. I scorn you that ye wail,
Who use your petty griefs for pedestals
To stand on, beckoning pity from without,
And deal in pathos of antithesis
Of what ye *were* forsooth, and what ye are; —
I scorn you like an angel! Yet, one cry
I, too, would drive up like a column erect,
Marble to marble, from my heart to heaven,
A monument of anguish to transpierce
And overtop your vapory complaints
Expressed from feeble woes.
Earth Spirits. I wail, I wail!
Lucifer. For, O ye heavens, ye are my witnesses,
That *I*, struck out from nature in a blot,
The outcast and the mildew of things good,
The leper of angels, the excepted dust
Under the common rain of daily gifts, —
I the snake, I the tempter, I the cursed, —
To whom the highest and the lowest alike
Say, Go from us — we have no need of thee, —
Was made by God like others. Good and fair,
He did create me! — ask him, if not fair!
Ask, if I caught not fair and silverly
His blessing for chief angels on my head
Until it grew there, a crown crystallized!
Ask, if he never called me by my name,
Lucifer — kindly said as 'Gabriel' —
Lucifer — soft as 'Michael!' while serene
I, standing in the glory of the lamps,
Answered 'my Father,' innocent of shame
And of the sense of thunder. Ha! ye think,
White angels in your niches, — I repent,
And would tread down my own offences back
To service at the footstool? *that's* read wrong!
I cry as the beast did, that I may cry —
Expansive, not appealing! Fallen so deep,
Against the sides of this prodigious pit
I cry — cry — dashing out the hands of wail
On each side, to meet anguish everywhere,
And to attest it in the ecstasy
And exaltation of a woe sustained
Because provoked and chosen.
Pass along
Your wilderness, vain mortals! Puny griefs
In transitory shapes, be henceforth dwarfed
To your own conscience, by the dread extremes
Of what I am and have been. If ye have fallen,
It is but a step's fall, — the whole ground beneath
Strewn woolly soft with promise! if ye have sinned,
Your prayers tread high as angels! if ye have grieved,
Ye are too mortal to be pitiable,
The power to die disproves the right to grieve.
Go to! ye call this ruin? I half scorn

The ill I did you! Were ye wronged by me,
Hated and tempted and undone of me, —
Still, what 's your hurt to mine of doing hurt,
Of hating, tempting, and so ruining?
This sword's *hilt* is the sharpest, and cuts through
The hand that wields it.
Go! I curse you all.
Hate one another — feebly — as ye can!
I would not certes cut you short in hate,
Far be it from me! hate on as ye can!
I breathe into your faces, spirits of earth,
As wintry blast may breathe on wintry leaves
And lifting up their brownness show beneath
The branches bare. Beseech you, spirits, give
To Eve who beggarly entreats your love
For her and Adam when they shall be dead,
An answer rather fitting to the sin
Than to the sorrow — as the heavens, I trow,
For justice' sake gave theirs.
I curse you both,
Adam and Eve. Say grace as after meat,
After my curses! May your tears fall hot
On all the hissing scorns o' the creatures here, —
And yet rejoice! Increase and multiply,
Ye in your generations, in all plagues,
Corruptions, melancholies, poverties,
And hideous forms of life and fears of death, —
The thought of death being alway imminent,
Immovable and dreadful in your life,
And deafly and dumbly insignificant
Of any hope beyond, — as death itself,
Whichever of you lieth dead the first,
Shall seem to the survivor — yet rejoice!
My curse catch at you strongly, body and soul,
And HE find no redemption — nor the wing
Of seraph move your way; and yet rejoice!
Rejoice, — because ye have not, set in you,
This hate which shall pursue you — this fire-hate
Which glares without, because it burns within —
Which kills from ashes — this potential hate,
Wherein I, angel, in antagonism
To God and his reflex beatitudes,
Moan ever, in the central universe,
With the great woe of striving against Love
And gasp for space amid the Infinite,
And toss for rest amid the Desertness,
Self-orphaned by my will, and self-elect
To kingship of resistant agony
Toward the Good round me — hating good and love,
And willing to hate good and to hate love,
And willing to will on so evermore,
Scorning the past and damning the to-come —
Go and rejoice! I curse you.
[LUCIFER *vanishes.*

Earth Spirits.
And we scorn you! there 's no pardon
Which can lean to you aright.
When your bodies take the guerdon
Of the death-curse in our sight,
Then the bee that hummeth lowest shall transcend you:
Then ye shall not move an eyelid
Though the stars look down your eyes;
And the earth which ye defilèd
Shall expose you to the skies, —
'Lo! these kings of ours, who sought to comprehend you.'

First Spirit.
And the elements shall boldly
All your dust to dust constrain.
Unresistedly and coldly
I will smite you with my rain.
From the slowest of my frosts is no receding.

Second Spirit.
And my little worm, appointed
To assume a royal part,
He shall reign, crowned and anointed,
O'er the noble human heart.
Give him counsel against losing of that Eden!

Adam. Do ye scorn us? Back your scorn
Toward your faces gray and lorn,
As the wind drives back the rain,
Thus I drive with passion-strife,
I who stand beneath God's sun,
Made like God, and, though undone,
Not unmade for love and life.
Lo! ye utter threats in vain.
By my free will that chose sin,
By mine agony within
Round the passage of the fire,

By the pinings which disclose
That my native soul is higher
Than what it chose,
We are yet too high, O Spirits, for your disdain !
Eve. Nay, beloved ! If these be low,
We confront them from no height.
We have stooped down to their level
By infecting them with evil,
And their scorn that meets our blow
Scathes aright.
Amen. Let it be so.
Earth Spirits.
We shall triumph — triumph greatly
When ye lie beneath the sward.
There, our lily shall grow stately
Though ye answer not a word,
And her fragrance shall be scornful of your silence:
While your throne ascending calmly
We, in heirdom of your soul,
Flash the river, lift the palm-tree,
The dilated ocean roll,
By the thoughts that throbbed within you, round the islands.

Alp and torrent shall inherit
Your significance of will,
And the grandeur of your spirit
Shall our broad savannahs fill;
In our winds, your exultations shall be springing !
Even your parlance which inveigles,
By our rudeness shall be won.
Hearts poetic in our eagles
Shall beat up against the sun
And strike downward in articulate clear singing.

Your bold speeches our Behemoth
With his thunderous jaw shall wield.
Your high fancies shall our Mammoth
Breathe sublimely up the shield
Of Saint Michael at God's throne, who waits to speed him:
Till the heavens' smooth-groovèd thunder
Spinning back, shall leave them clear,
And the angels, smiling wonder,
With dropt looks from sphere to sphere,
Shall cry 'Ho, ye heirs of Adam ! ye exceed him.'
Adam. Root out thine eyes, Sweet, from the dreary ground !
Beloved, we may be overcome by God,
But not by these.
Eve. By God, perhaps, in these.
Adam. I think, not so. Had God foredoomed despair
He had not spoken hope. He may destroy
Certes, but not deceive.
Eve. Behold this rose !
I plucked it in our bower of Paradise
This morning as I went forth, and my heart
Has beat against its petals all the day.
I thought it would be always red and full
As when I plucked it. *Is* it ? — ye may see !
I cast it down to you that ye may see,
All of you ! — count the petals lost of it,
And note the colors fainted ! ye may see!
And I am as it is, who yesterday
Grew in the same place. O ye spirits of earth,
I almost, from my miserable heart,
Could here upbraid you for your cruel heart,
Which will not let me, down the slope of death,
Draw any of your pity after me,
Or lie still in the quiet of your looks,
As my flower, there, in mine.

[*A bleak wind, quickened with indistinct Human Voices, spins around the Earth-zodiac, filling the circle with its presence; and then, wailing off into the East, carries the rose away with it.* EVE *falls upon her face.* ADAM *stands erect.*

Adam. So, verily,
The last departs.
Eve. So Memory follows Hope,
And Life both. Love said to me, 'Do not die,'
And I replied, 'O Love, I will not die.
I exiled and I will not orphan Love.'
But now it is no choice of mine to die:
My heart throbs from me.
Adam. Call it straightway back !
Death's consummation crowns completed life,
Or comes too early. Hope being set on thee
For others, if for others then for thee, —
For thee and me.

[*The wind revolves from the East, and round again to the East, perfumed by the Eden rose, and full of Voices*

which sweep out into articulation as they pass.
Let thy soul shake its leaves
To feel the mystic wind — hark!
Eve. I hear life.
Infant Voices passing in the wind.
O we live, O we live —
And this life that we receive
Is a warm thing and a new,
Which we softly bud into
From the heart and from the brain, —
Something strange that overmuch is
Of the sound and of the sight,
Flowing round in trickling touches,
With a sorrow and delight, —
Yet is it all in vain?
Rock us softly,
Lest it be all in vain.
Youthful Voices passing.
O we live, O we live —
And this life that we achieve
Is a loud thing and a bold
Which with pulses manifold
Strikes the heart out full and fain —
Active doer, noble liver,
Strong to struggle, sure to conquer,
Though the vessel's prow will quiver
At the lifting of the anchor:
Yet do we strive in vain?
Infant Voices passing.
Rock us softly,
Lest it be all in vain.
Poet Voices passing.
O we live, O we live —
And this life that we conceive
Is a clear thing and a fair,
Which we set in crystal air
That its beauty may be plain!
With a breathing and a flooding
Of the heaven-life on the whole,
While we hear the forests budding
To the music of the soul —
Yet is it tuned in vain?
Infant Voices passing.
Rock us softly,
Lest it be all in vain.
Philosophic Voices passing.
O we live, O we live —
And this life that we perceive
Is a great thing and a grave
Which for others' use we have,
Duty-laden to remain.
We are helpers, fellow-creatures,
Of the right against the wrong;
We are earnest-hearted teachers
Of the truth which maketh strong —
Yet do we teach in vain?
Infant Voices passing.
Rock us softly,
Lest it be all in vain.
Revel Voices passing.
O we live, O we live —
And this life that we reprieve
Is a low thing and a light,
Which is jested out of sight
And made worthy of disdain!
Strike with bold electric laughter
The high tops of things divine —
Turn thy head, my brother, after,
Lest thy tears fall in my wine!
For is all laughed in vain?
Infant Voices passing.
Rock us softly,
Lest it be all in vain.
Eve. I hear a sound of life — of life like ours —
Of laughter and of wailing, of grave speech,
Of little plaintive voices innocent,
Of life in separate courses flowing out
Like our four rivers to some outward main.
I hear life — life!
Adam. And, so, thy cheeks have snatched
Scarlet to paleness, and thine eyes drink fast
Of glory from full cups, and thy moist lips
Seem trembling, both of them, with earnest doubts
Whether to utter words or only smile.
Eve. Shall I be mother of the coming life?
Hear the steep generations, how they fall
Adown the visionary stairs of Time
Like supernatural thunders — far, yet near, —
Sowing their fiery echoes through the hills.
Am I a cloud to these — mother to these?
Earth Spirits. And bringer of the curse upon all these.
[Eve *sinks down again.*
Poet Voices passing.
O we live, O we live —
And this life that we conceive
Is a noble thing and high,
Which we climb up loftily
To view God without a stain;
Till, recoiling where the shade is,
We retread our steps again,
And descend the gloomy Hades

To resume man's mortal pain.
Shall it be climbed in vain?
Infant Voices passing.
Rock us softly,
Lest it be all in vain.
Love Voices passing.
O we live, O we live —
And this life we would retrieve,
Is a faithful thing apart
Which we love in, heart to heart,
Until one heart fitteth twain.
'Wilt thou be one with me?'
'I will be one with thee.'
'Ha, ha! — we love and live!'
Alas! ye love and die.
Shriek — who shall reply?
For is it not loved in vain?
Infant Voices passing.
Rock us softly,
Though it be all in vain.
Aged Voices passing.
O we live, O we live —
And this life we would survive,
Is a gloomy thing and brief,
Which consummated in grief,
Leaveth ashes for all gain.
Is it not *all* in vain?
Infant Voices passing.
Rock us softly,
Though it be *all* in vain.
[*Voices die away.*
Earth Spirits. And bringer of the curse upon all these.
Eve. The voices of foreshown Humanity
Die off; — so let me die.
Adam. So let us die,
When God's will soundeth the right hour of death.
Earth Spirits. And bringer of the curse upon all these.
Eve. O Spirits! by the gentleness ye use
In winds at night, and floating clouds at noon,
In gliding waters under lily-leaves,
In chirp of crickets, and the settling hush
A bird makes in her nest with feet and wings, —
Fulfil your natures now!
Earth Spirits. Agreed, allowed!
We gather out our natures like a cloud,
And thus fulfil their lightnings! Thus, and thus!
Hearken, oh hearken to us!
First Spirit.
As the storm-wind blows bleakly from the norland,
As the snow-wind beats blindly on the moorland,
As the simoom drive shot across the desert,
As the thunder roars deep in the Unmeasured,
As the torrent tears the ocean-world to atoms,
As the whirlpool grinds it fathoms below fathoms,
Thus, — and thus!
Second Spirit.
As the yellow toad, that spits its poison chilly,
As the tiger, in the jungle crouching stilly,
As the wild boar, with ragged tusks of anger,
As the wolf-dog, with teeth of glittering clangor,
As the vultures, that scream against the thunder,
As the owlets, that sit and moan asunder,
Thus, — and thus!
Eve. Adam! God!
Adam. Cruel, unrelenting Spirits!
By the power in me of the sovran soul
Whose thoughts keep pace yet with the angel's march,
I charge you into silence — trample you
Down to obedience. I am king of you!
Earth Spirits.
Ha, ha! thou art king!
With a sin for a crown,
And a soul undone!
Thou, the antagonized,
Tortured and agonized,
Held in the ring
Of the zodiac!
Now, king, beware!
We are many and strong
Whom thou standest among, —
And we press on the air,
And we stifle thee back,
And we multiply where
Thou wouldst trample us down
From rights of our own
To an utter wrong —
And, from under the feet of thy scorn, O forlorn,
We shall spring up like corn,
And our stubble be strong.

Adam. God, there is power in thee! I make appeal
Unto thy kingship.
Eve. There is pity in THEE,
O sinned against, great God! — My seed, my seed,
There is hope set on THEE — I cry to thee,
Thou mystic Seed that shalt be! — leave us not
In agony beyond what we can bear,
Fallen in debasement below thunder-mark,
A mark for scorning — taunted and perplext
By all these creatures we ruled yesterday,
Whom thou, Lord, rulest alway! O my Seed,
Through the tempestuous years that rain so thick
Betwixt my ghostly vision and thy face,
Let me have token! for my soul is bruised
Before the serpent's head is.
[*A vision of* CHRIST *appears in the midst of the Zodiac, which pales before the heavenly light. The Earth Spirits grow grayer and fainter.*
CHRIST. I AM HERE!
Adam. This is God! — Curse us not, God, any more!
Eve. But gazing so — so — with omnific eyes,
Lift my soul upward till it touch thy feet!
Or lift it only, — not to seem too proud, —
To the low height of some good angel's feet,
For such to tread on when he walketh straight
And thy lips praise him!
CHRIST. Spirits of the earth,
I meet you with rebuke for the reproach
And cruel and unmitigated blame
Ye cast upon your masters. True, they have sinned;
And true their sin is reckoned into loss
For you the sinless. Yet, your innocence
Which of you praises? since God made your acts
Inherent in your lives, and bound your hands
With instincts and imperious sanctities
From self-defacement. Which of you disdains
These sinners who in falling proved their height
Above you by their liberty to fall?
And which of you complains of loss by them,
For whose delight and use ye have your life
And honor in creation? Ponder it!
This regent and sublime Humanity,
Though fallen, exceeds you! this shall film your sun,
Shall hunt your lightning to its lair of cloud,
Turn back your rivers, footpath all your seas,
Lay flat your forests, master with a look
Your lion at his fasting, and fetch down
Your eagle flying. Nay, without this law
Of mandom, ye would perish, — beast by beast
Devouring, — tree by tree, with strangling roots
And trunks set tuskwise. Ye would gaze on God
With imperceptive blankness up the stars,
And mutter, 'Why, God, hast thou made us thus?'
And pining to a sallow idiocy
Stagger up blindly against the ends of life,
Then stagnate into rottenness and drop
Heavily — poor, dead matter — piecemeal down
The abysmal spaces — like a little stone
Let fall to chaos. Therefore over you
Receive man's sceptre! — therefore be content
To minister with voluntary grace
And melancholy pardon, every rite
And function in you, to the human hand!
Be ye to man as angels are to God,
Servants in pleasure, singers of delight,
Suggesters to his soul of higher things
Than any of your highest! So at last,
He shall look round on you with lids too straight
To hold the grateful tears, and thank you well,
And bless you when he prays his secret prayers,
And praise you when he sings his open songs
For the clear song-note he has learnt in you
Of purifying sweetness, and extend
Across your head his golden fantasies
Which glorify you into soul from sense.

Go, serve him for such price! That not in vain
Nor yet ignobly ye shall serve, I place
My word here for an oath, mine oath for act
To be hereafter. In the name of which
Perfect redemption and perpetual grace,
I bless you through the hope and through the peace
Which are mine, — to the Love, which is myself.
Eve. Speak on still, Christ! Albeit thou bless me not
In set words, I am blessed in hearkening thee —
Speak, Christ!
CHRIST. Speak, Adam! Bless the woman, man!
It is thine office.
Adam. Mother of the world,
Take heart before this Presence! Lo, my voice,
Which, naming erst the creatures, did express
(God breathing through my breath) the attributes
And instincts of each creature in its name,
Floats to the same afflatus, — floats and heaves
Like a water-weed that opens to a wave, —
A full-leaved prophecy affecting thee,
Out fairly and wide. Henceforward, arise, aspire
To all the calms and magnanimities,
The lofty uses and the noble ends,
The sanctified devotion and full work,
To which thou art elect for evermore,
First woman, wife, and mother!
Eve. And first in sin.
Adam. And also the sole bearer of the Seed
Whereby sin dieth. Raise the majesties
Of thy disconsolate brows, O well-beloved,
And front with level eyelids the To-come,
And all the dark o' the world! Rise, woman, rise
To thy peculiar and best altitudes
Of doing good and of enduring ill,
Of comforting for ill, and teaching good,
And reconciling all that ill and good
Unto the patience of a constant hope, —
Rise with thy daughters! If sin came by thee,
And by sin, death, — the ransom-righteousness,
The heavenly life and compensative rest
Shall come by means of thee. If woe by thee
Had issue to the world, thou shalt go forth
An angel of the woe thou didst achieve,
Found acceptable to the world instead
Of others of that name, of whose bright steps
Thy deed stripped bare the hills. Be satisfied;
Something thou hast to bear through womanhood,
Peculiar suffering answering to the sin, —
Some pang paid down for each new human life,
Some weariness in guarding such a life,
Some coldness from the guarded, some mistrust
From those thou hast too well served, from those beloved
Too loyally some treason; feebleness
Within thy heart, and cruelty without,
And pressures of an alien tyranny
With its dynastic reasons of larger bones
And stronger sinews. But, go to! thy love
Shall chant itself its own beatitudes
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest. Such a crown
I set upon thy head, — Christ witnessing
With looks of prompting love — to keep thee clear
Of all reproach against the sin forgone,
From all the generations which succeed.
Thy hand which plucked the apple I clasp close,
Thy lips which spake wrong counsel I kiss close,
I bless thee in the name of Paradise
And by the memory of Edenic joys
Forfeit and lost, — by that last cypress tree,
Green at the gate, which thrilled as we came out,
And by the blessèd nightingale which threw
Its melancholy music after us, —
And by the flowers, whose spirits full of smells
Did follow softly, plucking us behind

Back to the gradual banks and vernal bowers
And fourfold river-courses. — By all these,
I bless thee to the contraries of these,
I bless thee to the desert and the thorns,
To the elemental change and turbulence,
And to the roar of the estrangèd beasts,
And to the solemn dignities of grief, —
To each one of these ends, — and to their END
Of Death and the hereafter.
Eve. I accept
For me and for my daughters this high part
Which lowly shall be counted. Noble work
Shall hold me in the place of garden-rest,
And in the place of Eden's lost delight
Worthy endurance of permitted pain;
While on my longest patience there shall wait
Death's speechless angel, smiling in the east,
Whence cometh the cold wind. I bow myself
Humbly henceforward on the ill I did,
That humbleness may keep it in the shade.
Shall it be so? shall I smile, saying so?
O Seed! O King! O God, who *shalt* be seed, —
What shall I say? As Eden's fountains swelled
Brightly betwixt their banks, so swells my soul
Betwixt thy love and power!
And, sweetest thoughts
Of forgone Eden! now, for the first time
Since God said 'Adam,' walking through the trees,
I dare to pluck you as I plucked erewhile
The lily or pink, the rose or heliotrope.
So pluck I you — so largely — with both hands,
And throw you forward on the outer earth,
Wherein we are cast out, to sweeten it.
Adam. As thou, Christ, to illume it, holdest Heaven
Broadly over our heads.

[*The* CHRIST *is gradually transfigured, during the following phrases of dialogue, into humanity and suffering.*

Eve. O Saviour Christ
Thou standest mute in glory, like the sun!
Adam. We worship in thy silence, Saviour Christ!
Eve. Thy brows grow grander with a forecast woe, —
Diviner, with the possible of death.
We worship in thy sorrow, Saviour Christ!
Adam. How do thy clear, still eyes transpierce our souls,
As gazing *through* them toward the Father-throne
In a pathetical, full Deity,
Serenely as the stars gaze through the air
Straight on each other!
Eve. O pathetic Christ,
Thou standest mute in glory, like the moon!
CHRIST. Eternity stands alway fronting God;
A stern colossal image, with blind eyes
And grand dim lips that murmur evermore
God, God, God! while the rush of life and death,
The roar of act and thought, of evil and good,
The avalanches of the ruining worlds
Tolling down space, — the new worlds' genesis
Budding in fire, — the gradual humming growth
Of the ancient atoms and first forms of earth,
The slow procession of the swathing seas
And firmamental waters, — and the noise
Of the broad, fluent strata of pure airs, —
All these flow onward in the intervals
Of that reiterated sound of — GOD!
Which WORD innumerous angels straightway lift
Wide on celestial altitudes of song
And choral adoration, and then drop
The burden softly, shutting the last notes
In silver wings. Howbeit in the noon of time
Eternity shall wax as dumb as Death,
While a new voice beneath the spheres shall cry,
'God! why hast thou forsaken me, my God?'
And not a voice in Heaven shall answer it.

[*The transfiguration is complete in sadness.*

Adam. Thy speech is of the Heavenlies, yet, O Christ,
Awfully human are thy voice and face!
Eve. My nature overcomes me from thine eyes.
CHRIST. In the set noon of time shall one from Heaven,
An angel fresh from looking upon God,
Descend before a woman, blessing her
With perfect benediction of pure love,

For all the world in all its elements,
For all the creatures of earth, air, and sea,
For all men in the body and in the soul,
Unto all ends of glory and sanctity.

Eve. O pale, pathetic Christ — I worship thee!
I thank thee for that woman!

CHRIST. Then, at last,
I, wrapping round me your humanity,
Which, being sustained, shall neither break nor burn
Beneath the fire of Godhead, will tread earth,
And ransom you and it, and set strong peace
Betwixt you and its creatures. With my pangs
I will confront your sins; and since those sins
Have sunken to all Nature's heart from yours,
The tears of my clean soul shall follow them
And set a holy passion to work clear
Absolute consecration. In my brow
Of kingly whiteness shall be crowned anew
Your discrowned human nature. Look on me!
As I shall be uplifted on a cross
In darkness of eclipse and anguish dread,
So shall I lift up in my piercèd hands,
Not into dark, but light — not unto death,
But life, — beyond the reach of guilt and grief,
The whole creation. Henceforth in my name
Take courage, O thou woman, — man, take hope!
Your grave shall be as smooth as Eden's sward,
Beneath the steps of your prospective thoughts,
And, one step past it, a new Eden-gate
Shall open on a hinge of harmony
And let you through to mercy. Ye shall fall
No more, within that Eden, nor pass out
Any more from it. In which hope, move on,
First sinners and first mourners! Live and love, —
Doing both nobly because lowlily!
Live and work, strongly because patiently!
And, for the deed of death, trust it to God
That it be well done, unrepented of,
And not to loss! And thence, with constant prayers,
Fasten your souls so high, that constantly
The smile of your heroic cheer may float
Above all floods of earthly agonies,
Purification being the joy of pain!

[*The vision of* CHRIST *vanishes.* ADAM *and* EVE *stand in an ecstasy. The Earth-zodiac pales away shade by shade, as the stars, star by star, shine out in the sky; and the following chant from the two* Earth Spirits *(as they sweep back into the Zodiac and disappear with it) accompanies the process of change.*

Earth Spirits.

By the mighty word thus spoken
Both for living and for dying,
We our homage-oath, once broken,
Fasten back again in sighing,
And the creatures and the elements renew their covenanting.

Here, forgive us all our scorning;
Here, we promise milder duty:
And the evening and the morning
Shall re-organize in beauty
A sabbath day of sabbath joy, for universal chanting.

And if, still, this melancholy
May be strong to overcome us,
If this mortal and unholy
We still fail to cast out from us,
If we turn upon you, unaware, your own dark influences, —

If ye tremble when surrounded
By our forest pine and palm trees,
If we cannot cure the wounded
With our gum trees and our balm trees,
And if your souls all mournfully sit down among your senses, —

Yet, O mortals, do not fear us!
We are gentle in our languor;
Much more good ye shall have near us
Than any pain or anger,
And our God's refracted blessing in our blessing shall be given.

By the desert's endless vigil
We will solemnize your passions,

By the wheel of the black eagle
We will teach you exaltations,
When he sails against the wind, to the white spot up in heaven.

Ye shall find us tender nurses
To your weariness of nature,
And our hands shall stroke the curse's
Dreary furrows from the creature,
Till your bodies shall lie smooth in death and straight and slumberful.

Then, a couch we will provide you
Where no summer heats shall dazzle,
Strewing on you and beside you
Thyme and rosemary and basil,
And the yew-tree shall grow overhead to keep all safe and cool.

Till the Holy Blood awaited
Shall be chrism around us running,
Whereby, newly-consecrated,
We shall leap up in God's sunning,
To join the spheric company which purer worlds assemble:

While, renewed by new evangels,
Soul-consummated, made glorious,
Ye shall brighten past the angels,
Ye shall kneel to Christ victorious,
And the rays around his feet beneath your sobbing lips shall tremble.

[*The phantastic Vision has all passed; the Earth-zodiac has broken like a belt, and is dissolved from the Desert. The* Earth Spirits *vanish, and the stars shine out above.*

CHORUS OF INVISIBLE ANGELS

While Adam *and* Eve *advance into the Desert, hand in hand*

Hear our heavenly promise
Through your mortal passion!
Love, ye shall have from us,
In a pure relation.
As a fish or bird
Swims or flies, if moving,
We unseen are heard
To live on by loving.
Far above the glances
Of your eager eyes,
Listen! we are loving.
Listen, through man's ignorances —
Listen, through God's mysteries —
Listen down the heart of things,
Ye shall hear our mystic wings
Murmurous with loving.
Through the opal door
Listen evermore
How we live by loving!

First Semichorus.
When your bodies therefore
Reach the grave their goal,
Softly will we care for
Each enfranchised soul.
Softly and unlothly
Through the door of opal
Toward the heavenly people,
Floated on a minor fine
Into the full chant divine,
We will draw you smoothly, —
While the human in the minor
Makes the harmony diviner.
Listen to our loving!

Second Semichorus.
There, a sough of glory
Shall breathe on you as you come,
Ruffling round the doorway
All the light of angeldom.
From the empyrean centre
Heavenly voices shall repeat,
'Souls redeemed and pardoned, enter,
For the chrism on you is sweet!'
And every angel in the place
Lowlily shall bow his face,
Folded fair on softened sounds,
Because upon your hands and feet
He images his Master's wounds.
Listen to our loving!

First Semichorus.
So, in the universe's
Consummated undoing,
Our seraphs of white mercies
Shall hover round the ruin.
Their wings shall stream upon the flame
As if incorporate of the same
In elemental fusion;
And calm their faces shall burn out
With a pale and mastering thought,
And a steadfast looking of desire
From out between the clefts of fire, —
While they cry, in the Holy's name,
To the final Restitution.
Listen to our loving!

Second Semichorus.
So, when the day of God is
To the thick graves accompted,
Awaking the dead bodies,

The angel of the trumpet
Shall split and shatter the earth
To the roots of the grave —
Which never before were slackened —
And quicken the charnel birth
With his blast so clear and brave
That the Dead shall start and stand erect
And every face of the burial-place
Shall the awful, single look reflect
Wherewith he them awakened.
Listen to our loving!

First Semichorus.

But wild is the horse of Death!
He will leap up wild at the clamor
Above and beneath.
And where is his Tamer
On that last day,
When he crieth Ha, ha!
To the trumpet's blare,
And paweth the earth's Aceldama?
When he tosseth his head,
The drear-white steed,
And ghastlily champeth the last moon-ray —
What angel there
Can lead him away,
That the living may rule for the Dead?

Second Semichorus.

Yet a TAMER shall be found!
One more bright than seraph crowned,
And more strong than cherub bold,
Elder, too, than angel old,
By his gray eternities.
He shall master and surprise
The steed of Death.
For He is strong, and He is fain.
He shall quell him with a breath,
And shall lead him where He will,
With a whisper in the ear,
Full of fear,
And a hand upon the mane,
Grand and still.

First Semichorus.

Through the flats of Hades where the souls assemble
He will guide the Death-steed calm between their ranks,
While, like beaten dogs, they a little moan and tremble
To see the darkness curdle from the horse's glittering flanks.
Through the flats of Hades where the dreary shade is,
Up the steep of heaven will the Tamer guide the steed, —
Up the spheric circles, circle above circle,
We who count the ages shall count the tolling tread —
Every hoof-fall striking a blinder blanker sparkle
From the stony orbs, which shall show as they were dead.

Second Semichorus.

All the way the Death-steed with tolling hoofs shall travel,
Ashen-gray the planets shall be motionless as stones,
Loosely shall the systems eject their parts coæval,
Stagnant in the spaces shall float the pallid moons:
Suns that touch their apogees, reeling from their level,
Shall run back on their axles, in wild low broken tunes.

Chorus.

Up against the arches of the crystal ceiling,
From the horse's nostrils shall stream the blurting breath:
Up between the angels pale with silent feeling
Will the Tamer calmly lead the horse of Death.

Semichorus.

Cleaving all that silence, cleaving all that glory,
Will the Tamer lead him straightway to the Throne;
'Look out, O Jehovah, to this I bring before Thee,
With a hand nail-piercèd, I who am thy Son.'
Then the Eye Divinest, from the Deepest, flaming,
On the mystic courser shall look out in fire:
Blind the beast shall stagger where It overcame him,
Meek as lamb at pasture, bloodless in desire.
Down the beast shall shiver, — slain amid the taming, —
And, by Life essential, the phantasm Death expire.

Chorus.

Listen, man, through life and death,
Through the dust and through the breath,
Listen down the heart of things!
Ye shall hear our mystic wings
Murmurous with loving.

A Voice from below. Gabriel, thou Gabriel!
A Voice from above. What wouldst *thou* with me?
First Voice. I heard thy voice sound in the angels' song,
And I would give thee question.
Second Voice. Question me!
First Voice. Why have I called thrice to my Morning Star
And had no answer? All the stars are out,
And answer in their places. Only in vain
I cast my voice against the outer rays
Of *my* Star shut in light behind the sun.
No more reply than from a breaking string,
Breaking when touched. Or is she *not* my star?
Where *is* my Star — my Star? Have ye cast down
Her glory like my glory? Has she waxed
Mortal, like Adam? Has she learnt to hate
Like any angel?
Second Voice. She is sad for thee.
All things grow sadder to thee, one by one.
Angel Chorus.
Live, work on, O Earthy!
By the Actual's tension,
Speed the arrow worthy
Of a pure ascension!
From the low earth round you,
Reach the heights above you:
From the stripes that wound you,
Seek the loves that love you!
God's divinest burneth plain
Through the crystal diaphane
Of our loves that love you.
First Voice. Gabriel, O Gabriel!
Second Voice. What wouldst *thou* with me?
First Voice. Is it true, O thou Gabriel, that the crown
Of sorrow which I claimed, another claims?
That HE claims THAT too?
Second Voice. Lost one, it is true.
First Voice. That HE will be an exile from his heaven,
To lead those exiles homeward?
Second Voice. It is true.
First Voice. That HE will be an exile by his will,
As I by mine election?
Second Voice. It is true.
First Voice. That *I* shall stand sole exile finally, —
Made desolate for fruition?
Second Voice. It is true.
First Voice. Gabriel!
Second Voice. I hearken.
First Voice. Is it true besides —
Aright true — that mine orient Star will give
Her name of 'Bright and Morning-Star' to HIM, —
And take the fairness of his virtue back
To cover loss and sadness?
Second Voice. It is true.
First Voice. Untrue, Untrue! O Morning Star, O MINE,
Who sittest secret in a veil of light
Far up the starry spaces, say — *Untrue!*
Speak but so loud as doth a wasted moon
To Tyrrhene waters. I am Lucifer.
[*A pause. Silence in the stars.*
All things grow sadder to me, one by one.
Angel Chorus.
Exiled human creatures,
Let your hope grow larger!
Larger grows the vision
Of the new delight.
From this chain of Nature's
God is the Discharger,
And the Actual's prison
Opens to your sight.
Semichorus.
Calm the stars and golden
In a light exceeding:
What their rays have measured
Let your feet fulfil!
These are stars beholden
By your eyes in Eden,
Yet, across the desert,
See them shining still!
Chorus.
Future joy and far light
Working such relations,
Hear us singing gently
Exiled is not lost!
God, above the starlight,
God, above the patience,
Shall at last present ye
Guerdons worth the cost.
Patiently enduring,
Painfully surrounded,
Listen how we love you,
Hope the uttermost!
Waiting for that curing
Which exalts the wounded,

Hear us sing above you —
Exiled, but not lost!

[*The stars shine on brightly while* Adam *and* Eve *pursue their way into the far wilderness. There is a sound through the silence, as of the falling tears of an angel.*

SONNETS

THE SOUL'S EXPRESSION

With stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream and thought and feeling interwound,
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual ground.
This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air:
But if I did it, — as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there,
Before that dread apocalypse of soul.

THE SERAPH AND POET

The seraph sings before the manifest
God-One, and in the burning of the Seven,
And with the full life of consummate Heaven
Heaving beneath him like a mother's breast
Warm with her first-born's slumber in that nest.
The poet sings upon the earth grave-riven,
Before the naughty world, soon self-forgiven
For wronging him, — and in the darkness prest
From his own soul by worldly weights. Even so,
Sing, seraph with the glory! heaven is high;
Sing, poet with the sorrow! earth is low:
The universe's inward voices cry
'Amen' to either song of joy and woe:
Sing, seraph, — poet, — sing on equally!

ON A PORTRAIT OF WORDSWORTH BY B. R. HAYDON

First printed in the *Athenæum*, October 29, 1842, as 'On Mr. Haydon's Portrait of Wordsworth.'

Wordsworth upon Helvellyn! Let the cloud
Ebb audibly along the mountain-wind,
Then break against the rock, and show behind
The lowland valleys floating up to crowd
The sense with beauty. He with forehead bowed
And humble-lidded eyes, as one inclined
Before the sovran thought of his own mind,
And very meek with inspirations proud,
Takes here his rightful place as poet-priest
By the high altar, singing prayer and prayer
To the higher Heavens. A noble vision free
Our Haydon's hand has flung out from the mist:
No portrait this, with Academic air!
This is the poet and his poetry.

PAST AND FUTURE

My future will not copy fair my past
On any leaf but Heaven's. Be fully done,
Supernal Will! I would not fain be one
Who, satisfying thirst and breaking fast,
Upon the fulness of the heart at last
Says no grace after meat. My wine has run
Indeed out of my cup, and there is none
To gather up the bread of my repast
Scattered and trampled; yet I find some good
In earth's green herbs, and streams that bubble up
Clear from the darkling ground, — content until
I sit with angels before better food:
Dear Christ! when thy new vintage fills my cup,
This hand shall shake no more, nor that wine spill.

IRREPARABLENESS

I HAVE been in the meadows all the day
And gathered there the nosegay that you see,
Singing within myself as bird or bee
When such do field-work on a morn of May.
But, now I look upon my flowers, decay
Has met them in my hands more fatally
Because more warmly clasped, — and sobs are free
To come instead of songs. What do you say,
Sweet counsellors, dear friends? that I should go
Back straightway to the fields and gather more?
Another, sooth, may do it, but not I!
My heart is very tired, my strength is low,
My hands are full of blossoms plucked before,
Held dead within them till myself shall die.

TEARS

THANK God, bless God, all ye who suffer not
More grief than ye can weep for. That is well —
That is light grieving! lighter, none befell
Since Adam forfeited the primal lot.
Tears! what are tears? The babe weeps in its cot,
The mother singing; at her marriage-bell
The bride weeps, and before the oracle
Of high-faned hills the poet has forgot
Such moisture on his cheeks. Thank God for grace,
Ye who weep only! If, as some have done,
Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place
And touch but tombs, — look up! those tears will run
Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun.

GRIEF

I TELL you, hopeless grief is passionless;
That only men incredulous of despair,
Half-taught in anguish, through the midnight air
Beat upward to God's throne in loud access
Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness,
In souls as countries, lieth silent-bare
Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare
Of the absolute Heavens. Deep-hearted man, express
Grief for thy Dead in silence like to death —
Most like a monumental statue set
In everlasting watch and moveless woe
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.
Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:
If it could weep, it could arise and go.

SUBSTITUTION

WHEN some belovèd voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new —
What hope? what help? what music will undo
That silence to your sense? Not friendship's sigh,
Not reason's subtle count; not melody
Of viols, nor of pipes that Faunus blew;
Not songs of poets, nor of nightingales
Whose hearts leap upward through the cypress-trees
To the clear moon; nor yet the spheric laws
Self-chanted, nor the angels' sweet 'All hails,'
Met in the smile of God: nay, none of these.
Speak THOU, availing Christ! — and fill this pause.

COMFORT

SPEAK low to me, my Saviour, low and sweet
From out the hallelujahs, sweet and low
Lest I should fear and fall, and miss Thee so
Who art not missed by any that entreat.
Speak to me as to Mary at thy feet!

And if no precious gums my hands bestow,
Let my tears drop like amber while I go
In reach of thy divinest voice complete
In humanest affection — thus, in sooth,
To lose the sense of losing. As a child,
Whose song-bird seeks the wood for evermore,
Is sung to in its stead by mother's mouth
Till, sinking on her breast, love-reconciled,
He sleeps the faster that he wept before.

PERPLEXED MUSIC

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO E. J.

Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies, we cannot understand,
Of God's will in his worlds, the strain unfolds
In sad-perplexèd minors: deathly colds
Fall on us while we hear, and countermand
Our sanguine heart back from the fancy-land
With nightingales in visionary wolds.
We murmur 'Where is any certain tune
Or measured music in such notes as these?'
But angels, leaning from the golden seat,
Are not so minded; their fine ear hath won
The issue of completed cadences,
And, smiling down the stars, they whisper — SWEET.

WORK

What are we set on earth for? Say, to toil;
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o' the day, till it declines,
And Death's mild curfew shall from work assoil.
God did anoint thee with his odorous oil,
To wrestle, not to reign; and He assigns
All thy tears over, like pure crystallines,
For younger fellow-workers of the soil
To wear for amulets. So others shall
Take patience, labor, to their heart and hand,
From thy hand and thy heart and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to all.
The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,
And share its dew-drop with another near.

FUTURITY

And, O belovèd voices, upon which
Ours passionately call because erelong
Ye brake off in the middle of that song
We sang together softly, to enrich
The poor world with the sense of love, and witch
The heart out of things evil, — I am strong,
Knowing ye are not lost for aye among
The hills, with last year's thrush. God keeps a niche
In Heaven to hold our idols; and albeit
He brake them to our faces and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised, complete,
The dust swept from their beauty, — glorified
New Memnons singing in the great God-light.

THE TWO SAYINGS

Two sayings of the Holy Scriptures beat
Like pulses in the Church's brow and breast;
And by them we find rest in our unrest
And, heart deep in salt-tears, do yet entreat
God's fellowship as if on heavenly seat.
The first is JESUS WEPT, — whereon is prest
Full many a sobbing face that drops its best
And sweetest waters on the record sweet:
And one is where the Christ, denied and scorned,
LOOKED UPON PETER. Oh, to render plain,
By help of having loved a little and mourned,
That look of sovran love and sovran pain
Which HE, who could not sin yet suffered, turned
On him who could reject but not sustain!

THE LOOK

The Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word,
No gesture of reproach; the Heavens serene
Though heavy with armed justice, did not lean
Their thunders that way: the forsaken Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
What that look was, none guess; for those who have seen
Wronged lovers loving through a death-pang keen,
Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call.
And Peter, from the height of blasphemy —
'I never knew this man' — did quail and fall
As knowing straight THAT GOD; and turnèd free
And went out speechless from the face of all,
And filled the silence, weeping bitterly.

THE MEANING OF THE LOOK

I THINK that look of Christ might seem to say —
'Thou Peter! art thou then a common stone
Which I at last must break my heart upon,
For all God's charge to his high angels may
Guard my foot better? Did I yesterday
Wash *thy* feet, my beloved, that they should run
Quick to deny me 'neath the morning sun?
And do thy kisses, like the rest, betray?
The cock crows coldly. — Go, and manifest
A late contrition, but no bootless fear!
For when thy final need is dreariest,
Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here;
My voice to God and angels shall attest,
Because I KNOW *this man, let him be clear.*'

A THOUGHT FOR A LONELY DEATH-BED

INSCRIBED TO MY FRIEND E. C.

If God compel thee to this destiny,
To die alone, with none beside thy bed
To ruffle round with sobs thy last word said
And mark with tears the pulses ebb from thee, —
Pray then alone, 'O Christ, come tenderly!
By thy forsaken Sonship in the red
Drear wine-press, — by the wilderness outspread, —
And the lone garden where thine agony
Fell bloody from thy brow, — by all of those
Permitted desolations, comfort mine!
No earthly friend being near me, interpose
No deathly angel 'twixt my face and thine,
But stoop Thyself to gather my life's rose,
And smile away my mortal to Divine!'

WORK AND CONTEMPLATION

The woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
A pleasant chant, ballad or barcarole;
She thinketh of her song, upon the whole,
Far more than of her flax; and yet the reel
Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
With quick adjustment, provident control,
The lines — too subtly twisted to unroll —
Out to a perfect thread. I hence appeal
To the dear Christian Church — that we may do
Our Father's business in these temples mirk,
Thus swift and steadfast, thus intent and strong;
While thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
Some high calm spheric tune, and prove our work
The better for the sweetness of our song.

PAIN IN PLEASURE

A Thought lay like a flower upon mine heart.
And drew around it other thoughts like bees

For multitude and thirst of sweetnesses;
Whereat rejoicing, I desired the art
Of the Greek whistler, who to wharf and mart
Could lure those insect swarms from orange-trees,
That I might hive with me such thoughts and please
My soul so, always. Foolish counterpart
Of a weak man's vain wishes! While I spoke,
The thought I called a flower grew nettle-rough,
The thoughts, called bees, stung me to festering:
Oh, entertain (cried Reason as she woke)
Your best and gladdest thoughts but long enough,
And they will all prove sad enough to sting!

AN APPREHENSION

If all the gentlest-hearted friends I know
Concentred in one heart their gentleness,
That still grew gentler till its pulse was less
For life than pity, — I should yet be slow
To bring my own heart nakedly below
The palm of such a friend, that he should press
Motive, condition, means, appliances,
My false ideal joy and fickle woe,
Out full to light and knowledge; I should fear
Some plait between the brows, some rougher chime
In the free voice. O angels, let your flood
Of bitter scorn dash on me! do ye hear
What *I* say who bear calmly all the time
This everlasting face to face with God?

DISCONTENT

Light human nature is too lightly tost
And ruffled without cause, complaining on —
Restless with rest, until, being overthrown,
It learneth to lie quiet. Let a frost
Or a small wasp have crept to the innermost
Of our ripe peach, or let the wilful sun
Shine westward of our window, — straight we run
A furlong's sigh as if the world were lost.
But what time through the heart and through the brain
God hath transfixed us, — we, so moved before,
Attain to a calm. Ay, shouldering weights of pain,
We anchor in deep waters, safe from shore,
And hear submissive o'er the stormy main
God's chartered judgments walk for evermore.

PATIENCE TAUGHT BY NATURE

'O dreary life,' we cry, 'O dreary life!'
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven's true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle! Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land, savannah-swards
Unweary sweep, hills watch unworn, and rife
Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest-trees
To show, above, the unwasted stars that pass
In their old glory: O thou God of old,
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to these! —
But so much patience as a blade of grass
Grows by, contented through the heat and cold.

CHEERFULNESS TAUGHT BY REASON

I think we are too ready with complaint
In this fair world of God's. Had we no hope
Indeed beyond the zenith and the slope
Of yon gray blank of sky, we might grow faint
To muse upon eternity's constraint
Round our aspirant souls; but since the scope

Must widen early, is it well to droop,
For a few days consumed in loss and taint?
O pusillanimous Heart, be comforted
And, like a cheerful traveller, take the road,
Singing beside the hedge. What if the bread
Be bitter in thine inn, and thou unshod
To meet the flints? At least it may be said
'Because the way is *short*, I thank thee, God.'

EXAGGERATION

We overstate the ills of life, and take
Imagination (given us to bring down
The choirs of singing angels overshone
By God's clear glory) down our earth to rake
The dismal snows instead, flake following flake,
To cover all the corn; we walk upon
The shadow of hills across a level thrown,
And pant like climbers: near the alder brake
We sigh so loud, the nightingale within
Refuses to sing loud, as else she would.
O brothers, let us leave the shame and sin
Of taking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
The holy name of GRIEF! — holy herein,
That by the grief of ONE came all our good.

ADEQUACY

Now, by the verdure on thy thousand hills,
Belovèd England, doth the earth appear
Quite good enough for men to overbear
The will of God in, with rebellious wills!
We cannot say the morning-sun fulfils
Ingloriously its course, nor that the clear
Strong stars without significance insphere
Our habitation: we, meantime, our ills
Heap up against this good and lift a cry
Against this work-day world, this ill-spread feast,
As if ourselves were better certainly
Than what we come to. Maker and High Priest,
I ask thee not my joys to multiply, —
Only to make me worthier of the least.

TO GEORGE SAND

A DESIRE

Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,
Self-called George Sand! whose soul, amid the lions
Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance
And answers roar for roar, as spirits can:
I would some mild miraculous thunder ran
Above the applauded circus, in appliance
Of thine own nobler nature's strength and science,
Drawing two pinions, white as wings of swan,
From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place
With holier light! that thou to woman's claim
And man's, mightst join beside the angel's grace
Of a pure genius sanctified from blame,
Till child and maiden pressed to thine embrace
To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame.

TO GEORGE SAND

A RECOGNITION

True genius, but true woman! dost deny
The woman's nature with a manly scorn,
And break away the gauds and armlets worn
By weaker women in captivity?
Ah, vain denial! that revolted cry
Is sobbed in by a woman's voice forlorn, —
Thy woman's hair, my sister, all unshorn
Floats back dishevelled strength in agony,
Disproving thy man's name: and while before
The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,
We see thy woman-heart beat evermore
Through the large flame. Beat purer, heart, and higher,
Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore
Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire!

THE PRISONER

I count the dismal time by months and years
Since last I felt the green sward under foot,

And the great breath of all things summer-mute
Met mine upon my lips. Now earth appears
As strange to me as dreams of distant spheres
Or thoughts of Heaven we weep at. Nature's lute
Sounds on, behind this door so closely shut,
A strange wild music to the prisoner's ears,
Dilated by the distance, till the brain
Grows dim with fancies which it feels too fine:
While ever, with a visionary pain,
Past the precluded senses, sweep and shine
Streams, forests, glades, and many a golden train
Of sunlit hills transfigured to Divine.

INSUFFICIENCY

When I attain to utter forth in verse
Some inward thought, my soul throbs audibly
Along my pulses, yearning to be free
And something farther, fuller, higher, rehearse,
To the individual, true, and the universe,
In consummation of right harmony:
But, like a wind-exposed distorted tree,
We are blown against for ever by the curse
Which breathes through Nature. Oh, the world is weak!
The effluence of each is false to all,
And what we best conceive we fail to speak.
Wait, soul, until thine ashen garments fall,
And then resume thy broken strains, and seek
Fit peroration without let or thrall.

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1839.

I

A knight of gallant deeds
  And a young page at his side,
From the holy war in Palestine
  Did slow and thoughtful ride,
As each were a palmer and told for beads
  The dews of the eventide.

II

'O young page,' said the knight,
  'A noble page art thou!
Thou fearest not to steep in blood
  The curls upon thy brow;
And once in the tent, and twice in the fight,
  Didst ward me a mortal blow.'

III

'O brave knight,' said the page,
  'Or ere we hither came,
We talked in tent, we talked in field,
  Of the bloody battle-game;
But here, below this greenwood bough,
  I cannot speak the same.

IV

'Our troop is far behind,
  The woodland calm is new;
Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs
  Tread deep the shadows through;
And, in my mind, some blessing kind
  Is dropping with the dew.

V

'The woodland calm is pure —
  I cannot choose but have
A thought from these, o' the beechen-trees,
  Which in our England wave,
And of the little finches fine
Which sang there while in Palestine
  The warrior-hilt we drave.

VI

'Methinks, a moment gone,
  I heard my mother pray!
I heard, sir knight, the prayer for me
  Wherein she passed away;
And I know the heavens are leaning down
  To hear what I shall say.'

VII

The page spake calm and high,
  As of no mean degree;
Perhaps he felt in nature's broad
  Full heart, his own was free:
And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,
  Then answered smilingly —

VIII

'Sir page, I pray your grace!
  Certes, I meant not so
To cross your pastoral mood, sir page,
  With the crook of the battle-bow;

But a knight may speak of a lady's face,
I ween, in any mood or place,
If the grasses die or grow.

IX

'And this I meant to say —
My lady's face shall shine
As ladies' faces use, to greet
My page from Palestine;
Or, speak she fair or prank she gay,
She is no lady of mine.

X

'And this I meant to fear —
Her bower may suit thee ill;
For, sooth, in that same field and tent,
Thy *talk* was somewhat still:
And fitter thy hand for my knightly spear
Than thy tongue for my lady's will!'

XI

Slowly and thankfully
The young page bowed his head;
His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,
Until he blushed instead,
And no lady in her bower, pardiè,
Could blush more sudden red:
'Sir Knight, — thy lady's bower to me
Is suited well,' he said.

XII

Beati, beati, mortui!
From the convent on the sea,
One mile off, or scarce so nigh,
Swells the dirge as clear and high
As if that, over brake and lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of Saint Mary,
And the fifty tapers burning o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess dead before it,
And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek
Her voice did charge and bless, —
Chanting steady, chanting meek,
Chanting with a solemn breath,
Because that they are thinking less
Upon the dead than upon death.
Beati, beati, mortui!
Now the vision in the sound
Wheeleth on the wind around;
Now it sweepeth back, away —
The uplands will not let it stay
To dark the western sun:
Mortui! — away at last, —
Or ere the page's blush is past!
And the knight heard all, and the page heard none.

XIII

'A boon, thou noble knight,
If ever I servèd thee!
Though thou art a knight and I am a page,
Now grant a boon to me;
And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,
If little loved or loved aright
Be the face of thy ladye.'

XIV

Gloomily looked the knight —
'As a son thou hast servèd me,
And would to none I had granted boon
Except to only thee!
For haply then I should love aright,
For then I should know if dark or bright
Were the face of my ladye.

XV

'Yet it ill suits my knightly tongue
To grudge that granted boon,
That heavy price from heart and life
I paid in silence down;
The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine
My father's fame: I swear by mine,
That price was nobly won!

XVI

'Earl Walter was a brave old earl,
He was my father's friend;
And while I rode the lists at court
And little guessed the end,
My noble father in his shroud
Against a slanderer lying loud,
He rose up to defend.

XVII

'Oh, calm below the marble gray
My father's dust was strown!
Oh, meek above the marble gray
His image prayed alone!
The slanderer lied: the wretch was brave:
For, looking up the minister-nave,
He saw my father's knightly glaive
Was changed from steel to stone.

XVIII

'Earl Walter's glaive was steel,
With a brave old hand to wear it,

And dashed the lie back in the mouth
Which lied against the godly truth
And against the knightly merit:
The slanderer, 'neath the avenger's heel,
Struck up the dagger in appeal
From stealthy lie to brutal force —
And out upon the traitor's corse
Was yielded the true spirit.

XIX

'I would mine hand had fought that fight
And justified my father!
I would mine heart had caught that wound
And slept beside him rather!
I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend and marriage ring
Forced on my life together.

XX

'Wail shook Earl Walter's house;
His true wife shed no tear;
She lay upon her bed as mute
As the earl did on his bier:
Till — "Ride, ride fast," she said at last,
"And bring the avengèd's son anear!
Ride fast, ride free, as a dart can flee,
For white of blee with waiting for me
Is the corse in the next chambère."

XXI

'I came, I knelt beside her bed;
Her calm was worse than strife:
"My husband, for thy father dear,
Gave freely when thou wast not here
His own and eke my life.
A boon! Of that sweet child we make
An orphan for thy father's sake,
Make thou, for ours, a wife."

XXII

'I said, "My steed neighs in the court,
My bark rocks on the brine,
And the warrior's vow I am under now
To free the pilgrim's shrine;
But fetch the ring and fetch the priest
And call that daughter of thine,
And rule she wide from my castle on Nyde
While I am in Palestine."

XXIII

'In the dark chambère, if the bride was fair,
Ye wis, I could not see,
But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest fast prayed,
And wedded fast were we.
Her mother smiled upon her bed
As at its side we knelt to wed,
And the bride rose from her knee
And kissed the smile of her mother dead,
Or ever she kissed me.

XXIV

'My page, my page, what grieves thee so,
That the tears run down thy face?' —
'Alas, alas! mine own sistèr
Was in thy lady's case:
But *she* laid down the silks she wore
And followed him she wed before,
Disguised as his true servitor,
To the very battle-place.'

XXV

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,
A careless laugh laughed he:
'Well done it were for thy sistèr,
But not for my ladye!
My love, so please you, shall requite
No woman, whether dark or bright,
Unwomaned if she be.'

XXVI

The page stopped weeping and smiled cold —
'Your wisdom may declare
That womanhood is proved the best
By golden brooch and glossy vest
The mincing ladies wear;
Yet is it proved, and was of old,
Anear as well, I dare to hold,
By truth, or by despair.'

XXVII

He smiled no more, he wept no more,
But passionate he spake —
'Oh, womanly she prayed in tent,
When none beside did wake!
Oh, womanly she paled in fight,
For one belovèd's sake —
And her little hand, defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood
Most woman-pure did make!'

XXVIII

— 'Well done it were for thy sistèr,
Thou tellest well her tale!
But for my lady, she shall pray
I' the kirk of Nydesdale.

Not dread for me but love for me
Shall make my lady pale;
No casque shall hide her woman's tear —
It shall have room to trickle clear
Behind her woman's veil.'

XXIX

—'But what if she mistook thy mind
And followed thee to strife,
Then kneeling did entreat thy love
As Paynims ask for life?'
—'I would forgive, and evermore
Would love her as my servitor,
But little as my wife.

XXX

'Look up — there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies!
So high, so pure, and so apart,
A woman's honor lies.'
The page looked up — the cloud was sheen —
A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
Betwixt it and his eyes.

XXXI

Then dimly dropped his eyes away
From welkin unto hill —
Ha! who rides there? — the page is 'ware,
Though the cry at his heart is still:
And the page seeth all and the knight seeth none,
Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,
And the Saracens ride at will.

XXXII

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low, —
'Ride fast, my master, ride,
Or ere within the broadening dark
The narrow shadows hide.'
'Yea, fast, my page, I will do so,
And keep thou at my side.'

XXXIII

'Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way,
Thy faithful page precede.
For I must loose on saddle-bow
My battle-casque that galls, I trow,
The shoulder of my steed;
And I must pray, as I did vow,
For one in bitter need.

XXXIV

'Ere night I shall be near to thee, —
Now ride, my master, ride!
Ere night, as parted spirits cleave
To mortals too beloved to leave,
I shall be at thy side.'
The knight smiled free at the fantasy,
And adown the dell did ride.

XXXV

Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
No smile the word had won;
Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
I ween he had never gone:
Had the knight looked back to the page's geste,
I ween he had turned anon,
For dread was the woe in the face so young,
And wild was the silent geste that flung
Casque, sword to earth, as the boy down-sprung
And stood — alone, alone.

XXXVI

He clenched his hands as if to hold
His soul's great agony —
'Have I renounced my womanhood,
For wifehood unto *thee*,
And is this the last, last look of thine
That ever I shall see?

XXXVII

'Yet God thee save, and mayst thou have
A lady to thy mind,
More woman-proud and half as true
As one thou leav'st behind!
And God me take with Him to dwell —
For Him I cannot love too well,
As I have loved my kind.'

XXXVIII

She looketh up, in earth's despair,
The hopeful heavens to seek;
That little cloud still floateth there,
Whereof her loved did speak:
How bright the little cloud appears!
Her eyelids fall upon the tears,
And the tears down either cheek.

XXXIX

The tramp of hoof, the flash of steel —
The Paynims round her coming!
The sound and sight have made her calm, —
False page, but truthful woman;
She stands amid them all unmoved:
A heart once broken by the loved
Is strong to meet the foeman.

XL

'Ho, Christian page! art keeping sheep,
From pouring wine-cups resting?' —
'I keep my master's noble name,
For warring, not for feasting;
And if that here Sir Hubert were,
My master brave, my master dear,
Ye would not stay the questing.'

XLI

'Where is thy master, scornful page,
That we may slay or bind him?' —
'Now search the lea and search the wood,
And see if ye can find him!
Nathless, as hath been often tried,
Your Paynim heroes faster ride
Before him than behind him.'

XLII

'Give smoother answers, lying page,
Or perish in the lying!' —
'I trow that if the warrior brand
Beside my foot, were in my hand,
'T were better at replying!'
They cursed her deep, they smote her low,
They cleft her golden ringlets through;
The Loving is the Dying.

XLIII

She felt the scimitar gleam down,
And met it from beneath
With smile more bright in victory
Than any sword from sheath, —
Which flashed across her lip serene,
Most like the spirit-light between
The darks of life and death.

XLIV

Ingemisco, ingemisco!
From the convent on the sea,
Now it sweepeth solemnly,
As over wood and over lea
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of St. Mary,
And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess stark before it,
And the weary nuns with hearts that faintly
Beat along their voices saintly —
Ingemisco, ingemisco!
Dirge for abbess laid in shroud
Sweepeth o'er the shroudless dead,
Page or lady, as we said,
With the dews upon her head,
All as sad if not as loud.
Ingemisco, ingemisco!
Is ever a lament begun
By any mourner under sun,
Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one*?

THE LAY OF THE BROWN ROSARY

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1840 as, 'Legend of the Brown Rosary.'

FIRST PART

I

'ONORA, Onora,' — her mother is calling,
She sits at the lattice and hears the dew falling
Drop after drop from the sycamores laden
With dew as with blossom, and calls home the maiden,
'Night cometh, Onora.'

II

She looks down the garden-walk caverned with trees,
To the limes at the end where the green arbor is —
'Some sweet thought or other may keep where it found her,
While, forgot or unseen in the dreamlight around her,
Night cometh — Onora!'

III

She looks up the forest whose alleys shoot on
Like the mute minster-aisles when the anthem is done,
And the choristers sitting with faces aslant
Feel the silence to consecrate more than the chant —
'Onora, Onora!'

IV

And forward she looketh across the brown heath —
'Onora, art coming?' — what is it she seeth?
Nought, nought but the gray border-stone that is wist
To dilate and assume a wild shape in the mist —
'My daughter!' Then over

V

The casement she leaneth, and as she doth so
She is 'ware of her little son playing below:
'Now where is Onora?' He hung down his head
And spake not, then answering blushed scarlet-red, —
' At the tryst with her lover.'

VI

But his mother was wroth: in a sternness quoth she,
' As thou play'st at the ball art thou playing with me?
When we know that her lover to battle is gone,
And the saints know above that she loveth but one
And will ne'er wed another?'

VII

Then the boy wept aloud; 't was a fair sight yet sad
To see the tears run down the sweet blooms he had:
He stamped with his foot, said — 'The saints know I lied
Because truth that is wicked is fittest to hide:
Must I utter it, mother?'

VIII

In his vehement childhood he hurried within
And knelt at her feet as in prayer against sin,
But a child at a prayer never sobbeth as he —
'Oh! she sits with the nun of the brown rosary,
At nights in the ruin —

IX

'The old convent ruin the ivy rots off,
Where the owl hoots by day and the toad is sun-proof,
Where no singing-birds build and the trees gaunt and gray
As in stormy sea-coasts appear blasted one way —
But is *this* the wind's doing?

X

' A nun in the east wall was buried alive
Who mocked at the priest when he called her to shrive,
And shrieked such a curse, as the stone took her breath,
The old abbess fell backwards and swooned unto death
With an Ave half-spoken.

XI

'I tried once to pass it, myself and my hound,
Till, as fearing the lash, down he shivered to ground —
A brave hound, my mother! a brave hound, ye wot!
And the wolf thought the same with his fangs at her throat
In the pass of the Brocken.

XII

' At dawn and at eve, mother, who sitteth there
With the brown rosary never used for a prayer?
Stoop low, mother, low! If we went there to see,
What an ugly great hole in that east wall must be
At dawn and at even!

XIII

' Who meet there, my mother, at dawn and at even?
Who meet by that wall, never looking to heaven?
O sweetest my sister, what doeth with *thee*
The ghost of a nun with a brown rosary
And a face turned from heaven?

XIV

' Saint Agnes o'erwatcheth my dreams and erewhile
I have felt through mine eyelids the warmth of her smile;
But last night, as a sadness like pity came o'er her,
She whispered — "Say *two* prayers at dawn for Onora:
The Tempted is sinning."'

XV

'Onora, Onora!' they heard her not coming,

Not a step on the grass, not a voice through the gloaming;
But her mother looked up, and she stood on the floor
Fair and still as the moonlight that came there before,
And a smile just beginning:

XVI

It touches her lips but it dares not arise
To the height of the mystical sphere of her eyes,
And the large musing eyes, neither joyous nor sorry,
Sing on like the angels in separate glory
Between clouds of amber;

XVII

For the hair droops in clouds amber-colored till stirred
Into gold by the gesture that comes with a word;
While — O soft! — her speaking is so interwound
Of the dim and the sweet, 't is a twilight of sound
And floats through the chamber.

XVIII

'Since thou shrivest my brother, fair mother,' said she,
'I count on thy priesthood for marrying of me;
And I know by the hills that the battle is done,
That my lover rides on, will be here with the sun,
'Neath the eyes that behold thee.'

XIX

Her mother sat silent — too tender, I wis,
Of the smile her dead father smiled dying to kiss:
But the boy started up pale with tears, passion-wrought —
'O wicked fair sister, the hills utter nought!
If he cometh, who told thee?'

XX

'I know by the hills,' she resumed calm and clear,
'By the beauty upon them, that HE is anear:
Did they ever look *so* since he bade me adieu?
Oh, love in the waking, sweet brother, is true,
As Saint Agnes in sleeping!'

XXI

Half-ashamed and half-softened the boy did not speak,
And the blush met the lashes which fell on his cheek:
She bowed down to kiss him: dear saints, did he see
Or feel on her bosom the BROWN ROSARY,
That he shrank away weeping?

SECOND PART

A bed. ONORA, *sleeping.* Angels, *but not near.*

First Angel.
Must we stand so far, and she
So very fair?

Second Angel.
As bodies be.

First Angel.
And she so mild?

Second Angel.
As spirits when
They meeken, not to God, but men.

First Angel.
And she so young, that I who bring
Good dreams for saintly children, might
Mistake that small soft face to-night,
And fetch her such a blessèd thing
That at her waking she would weep
For childhood lost anew in sleep.
How hath she sinned?

Second Angel.
In bartering love;
God's love for man's.

First Angel.
We may reprove
The world for this, not only her:
Let me approach to breathe away
This dust o' the heart with holy air.

Second Angel.
Stand off! She sleeps, and did not pray.

First Angel.
Did none pray for her?

Second Angel.
Ay, a child, —

Who never, praying, wept before:
While, in a mother undefiled,
Prayer goeth on in sleep, as true
And pauseless as the pulses do.

First Angel.

Then I approach.

Second Angel.

It is not WILLED.

First Angel.

One word: is she redeemed?

Second Angel.

No more!
The place is filled. [Angels *vanish.*

Evil Spirit (in a Nun's garb by the bed).

Forbear that dream — forbear that dream! too near to heaven it leaned.

Onora (in sleep).

Nay, leave me this — but only this! 't is but a dream, sweet fiend!

Evil Spirit.

It is a *thought.*

Onora (in sleep).

A sleeping thought — most innocent of good:
It doth the Devil no harm, sweet fiend! it cannot if it would.
I say in it no holy hymn, I do no holy work,
I scarcely hear the sabbath-bell that chimeth from the kirk.

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream — forbear that dream!

Onora (in sleep).

Nay, let me dream at least.
That far-off bell, it may be took for viol at a feast:
I only walk among the fields, beneath the autumn-sun,
With my dead father, hand in hand, as I have often done.

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream — forbear that dream!

Onora (in sleep).

Nay, sweet fiend, let me go:
I never more can walk with *him*, oh, never more but so!
For they have tied my father's feet beneath the kirkyard stone,
Oh, deep and straight! oh, very straight! they move at nights alone:
And then he calleth through my dreams, he calleth tenderly,
'Come forth, my daughter, my beloved, and walk the fields with me!'

Evil Spirit.

Forbear that dream, or else disprove its pureness by a sign.

Onora (in sleep).

Speak on, thou shalt be satisfied, my word shall answer thine.
I heard a bird which used to sing when I a child was praying,
I see the poppies in the corn I used to sport away in:
What shall I do — tread down the dew and pull the blossoms blowing?
Or clap my wicked hands to fright the finches from the rowan?

Evil Spirit.

Thou shalt do something harder still. Stand up where thou dost stand
Among the fields of Dreamland with thy father hand in hand,
And clear and slow repeat the vow, declare its cause and kind,
Which not to break, in sleep or wake thou bearest on thy mind.

Onora (in sleep).

I bear a vow of sinful kind, a vow for mournful cause;
I vowed it deep, I vowed it strong, the spirits laughed applause:
The spirits trailed along the pines low laughter like a breeze,
While, high atween their swinging tops, the stars appeared to freeze.

Evil Spirit.

More calm and free, speak out to me why such a vow was made.

Onora (in sleep).

Because that God decreed my death and I shrank back afraid.
Have patience, O dead father mine! I did not fear to die —
I wish I were a young dead child and had thy company!
I wish I lay beside thy feet, a buried three-year child,
And wearing only a kiss of thine upon my lips that smiled!
The linden-tree that covers thee might so have shadowed twain,
For death itself I did not fear — 't is love that makes the pain:
Love feareth death. I was no child, I was betrothed that day;
I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not give away.
How could I bear to lie content and still beneath a stone,

And feel mine own betrothed go by — alas! no more mine own —
Go leading by in wedding pomp some lovely lady brave,
With cheeks that blushed as red as rose, while mine were white in grave?
How could I bear to sit in heaven, on e'er so high a throne,
And hear him say to her — to *her!* that else he loveth none?
Though e'er so high I sate above, though e'er so low he spake,
As clear as thunder I should hear the new oath he might take,
That hers, forsooth, were heavenly eyes — ah me, while very dim
Some heavenly eyes (indeed of heaven!) would darken down to *him!*

Evil Spirit.

Who told thee thou wast called to death?

Onora (in sleep).

I sate all night beside thee:
The gray owl on the ruined wall shut both his eyes to hide thee,
And ever he flapped his heavy wing all brokenly and weak,
And the long grass waved against the sky, around his gasping beak.
I sate beside thee all the night, while the moonlight lay forlorn
Strewn round us like a dead world's shroud in ghastly fragments torn:
And through the night, and through the hush, and over the flapping wing,
We heard beside the Heavenly Gate the angels murmuring:
We heard them say, 'Put day to day, and count the days to seven,
And God will draw Onora up the golden stairs of heaven.
And yet the Evil ones have leave that purpose to defer,
For if she has no need of Him, He has no need of her.'

Evil Spirit.

Speak out to me, speak bold and free.

Onora (in sleep).

And then I heard thee say —
I count upon my rosary brown the hours thou hast to stay!
Yet God permits us Evil ones to put by that decree,
Since if thou hast no need of Him, He has no need of thee:
And if thou wilt forgo the sight of angels, verily
Thy true love gazing on thy face shall guess what angels be;
Nor bride shall pass, save thee' . . . Alas! — my father's hand 's a-cold,
The meadows seem . . .

Evil Spirit.

Forbear the dream, or let the vow be told.

Onora (in sleep).

I vowed upon thy rosary brown, this string of antique beads,
By charnel lichens overgrown, and dank among the weeds,
This rosary brown which is thine own, — lost soul of buried nun!
Who, lost by vow, wouldst render now all souls alike undone, —
I vowed upon thy rosary brown, — and, till such vow should break,
A pledge always of living days 't was hung around my neck —
I vowed to thee on rosary (dead father, look not so!),
I would not thank God in my weal, nor seek God in my woe.

Evil Spirit.

And canst thou prove . . .

Onora (in sleep).

O love, my love! I felt him near again!
I saw his steed on mountain-head, I heard it on the plain!
Was this no weal for me to feel? Is greater weal than this?
Yet when he came, I wept his name — and the angels heard but *his.*

Evil Spirit.

Well done, well done!

Onora (in sleep).

Ah me, the sun! the dreamlight 'gins to pine, —
Ah me, how dread can look the Dead! Aroint thee, father mine!

She starteth from slumber, she sitteth upright,
And her breath comes in sobs, while she stares through the night;
There is nought; the great willow, her lattice before,
Large-drawn in the moon, lieth calm on the floor:
But her hands tremble fast as their pulses and, free
From the death-clasp, close over — the BROWN ROSARY.

THIRD PART

I

'Tis a morn for a bridal; the merry bride-bell
Rings clear through the greenwood that skirts the chapelle,
And the priest at the altar awaiteth the bride,
And the sacristans slyly are jesting aside
At the work shall be doing;

II

While down through the wood rides that fair company,
The youths with the courtship, the maids with the glee,
Till the chapel-cross opens to sight, and at once
All the maids sigh demurely and think for the nonce,
'And so endeth a wooing!'

III

And the bride and the bridegroom are leading the way,
With his hand on her rein, and a word yet to say;
Her dropt eyelids suggest the soft answers beneath,
And the little quick smiles come and go with her breath
When she sigheth or speaketh.

IV

And the tender bride-mother breaks off unaware
From an Ave, to think that her daughter is fair,
Till in nearing the chapel and glancing before,
She seeth her little son stand at the door:
Is it play that he seeketh?

V

Is it play, when his eyes wander innocent-wild
And sublimed with a sadness unfitting a child?
He trembles not, weeps not; the passion is done,
And calmly he kneels in their midst, with the sun
On his head like a glory.

VI

'O fair-featured maids, ye are many!' he cried,
'But in fairness and vileness who matcheth the bride?
O brave-hearted youths, ye are many! but whom
For the courage and woe can ye match with the groom
As ye see them before ye?'

VII

Out spake the bride's mother, 'The vileness is thine
If thou shame thine own sister, a bride at the shrine!'
Out spake the bride's lover, 'The vileness be mine
If he shame mine own wife at the hearth or the shrine
And the charge be unprovèd.

VIII

'Bring the charge, prove the charge, brother! speak it aloud:
Let thy father and hers hear it deep in his shroud!'
—'O father, thou seest, for dead eyes can see,
How she wears on her bosom a BROWN ROSARY,
O my father belovèd!'

IX

Then out laughed the bridegroom, and out laughed withal
Both maidens and youths by the old chapel-wall:
'So she weareth no love-gift, kind brother,' quoth he,
'She may wear an she listeth a brown rosary,
Like a pure-hearted lady.'

X

Then swept through the chapel the long bridal train;
Though he spake to the bride she replied not again;

On, as one in a dream, pale and stately she went
Where the altar-lights burn o'er the great sacrament,
Faint with daylight, but steady.

XI

But her brother had passed in between them and her,
And calmly knelt down on the high-altar stair —
Of an infantine aspect so stern to the view
That the priest could not smile on the child's eyes of blue
As he would for another.

XII

He knelt like a child marble-sculptured and white
That seems kneeling to pray on the tomb of a knight,
With a look taken up to each iris of stone
From the greatness and death where he kneeleth, but none
From the face of a mother.

XIII

'In your chapel, O priest, ye have wedded and shriven
Fair wives for the hearth, and fair sinners for heaven;
But this fairest my sister, ye think now to wed,
Bid her kneel where she standeth, and shrive her instead:
O shrive her and wed not!'

XIV

In tears, the bride's mother, — 'Sir priest, unto thee
Would he lie, as he lied to this fair company.'
In wrath, the bride's lover, — 'The lie shall be clear!
Speak it out, boy! the saints in their niches shall hear:
Be the charge proved or said not!'

XV

Then serene in his childhood he lifted his face,
And his voice sounded holy and fit for the place, —
'Look down from your niches, ye still saints, and see
How she wears on her bosom a BROWN ROSARY!
Is it used for the praying?'

XVI

The youths looked aside — to laugh there were a sin —
And the maidens' lips trembled from smiles shut within.
Quoth the priest, 'Thou art wild, pretty boy! Blessed she
Who prefers at her bridal a brown rosary
To a worldly arraying.'

XVII

The bridegroom spake low and led onward the bride
And before the high altar they stood side by side:
The rite-book is opened, the rite is begun,
They have knelt down together to rise up as one.
Who laughed by the altar?

XVIII

The maidens looked forward, the youths looked around,
The bridegroom's eye flashed from his prayer at the sound;
And each saw the bride, as if no bride she were,
Gazing cold at the priest without gesture of prayer,
As he read from the psalter.

XIX

The priest never knew that she did so, but still
He felt a power on him too strong for his will:
And whenever the Great Name was there to be read,
His voice sank to silence — THAT could not be said,
Or the air could not hold it.

XX

'I have sinnèd,' quoth he, 'I have sinnèd, I wot' —
And the tears ran adown his old cheeks at the thought:
They dropped fast on the book, but he read on the same,

And aye was the silence where should be the Name, —
As the choristers told it.

XXI

The rite-book is closed, and the rite being done
They, who knelt down together, arise up as one:
Fair riseth the bride — Oh, a fair bride is she,
But, for all (think the maidens) that brown rosary,
No saint at her praying!

XXII

What aileth the bridegroom? He glares blank and wide;
Then suddenly turning he kisseth the bride;
His lips stung her with cold; she glanced upwardly mute:
'Mine own wife,' he said, and fell stark at her foot
In the word he was saying.

XXIII

They have lifted him up, but his head sinks away,
And his face showeth bleak in the sunshine and gray.
Leave him now where he lieth — for oh, never more
Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a floor!
Let his bride gaze upon him.

XXIV

Long and still was her gaze while they chafèd him there
And breathed in the mouth whose last life had kissed her,
But when they stood up — only *they!* with a start
The shriek from her soul struck her pale lips apart:
She has lived, and forgone him!

XXV

And low on his body she droppeth adown —
'Didst call me thine own wife, belovèd — thine own?
Then take thine own with thee! thy coldness is warm
To the world's cold without thee! Come, keep me from harm
In a calm of thy teaching!'

XXVI

She looked in his face earnest-long, as in sooth
There were hope of an answer, and then kissed his mouth,
And with head on his bosom, wept, wept bitterly, —
'Now, O God, take pity — take pity on me!
God, hear my beseeching!'

XXVII

She was 'ware of a shadow that crossed where she lay,
She was 'ware of a presence that withered the day:
Wild she sprang to her feet, — 'I surrender to *thee*
The broken vow's pledge, the accursed rosary, —
I am ready for dying!'

XXVIII

She dashed it in scorn to the marble-paved ground
Where it fell mute as snow, and a weird music-sound
Crept up, like a chill, up the aisles long and dim, —
As the fiends tried to mock at the choristers' hymn
And moaned in the trying.

FOURTH PART

Onora looketh listlessly adown the garden walk:
'I am weary, O my mother, of thy tender talk.
I am weary of the trees a-waving to and fro,
Of the steadfast skies above, the running brooks below.
All things are the same, but I, — only I am dreary,
And, mother, of my dreariness behold me very weary.

'Mother, brother, pull the flowers I planted in the spring
And smiled to think I should smile more upon their gathering:
The bees will find out other flowers — oh, pull them, dearest mine,

And carry them and carry me before Saint Agnes' shrine.'
— Whereat they pulled the summer flowers she planted in the spring,
And her and them all mournfully to Agnes' shrine did bring.

She looked up to the pictured saint and gently shook her head —
'The picture is too calm for *me* — too calm for *me*,' she said:
'The little flowers we brought with us, before it we may lay,
For those are used to look at heaven, — but *I* must turn away,
Because no sinner under sun can dare or bear to gaze
On God's or angel's holiness, except in Jesu's face.'

She spoke with passion after pause — 'And were it wisely done
If we who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?
If we whose virtue is so weak should have a will so strong,
And stand blind on the rocks to choose the right path from the wrong?
To choose perhaps a love-lit hearth, instead of love and heaven, —
A single rose, for a rose-tree which beareth seven times seven?
A rose that droppeth from the hand, that fadeth in the breast, —
Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best!'

Then breaking into tears, — 'Dear God,' she cried, 'and must we see
All blissful things depart from us or ere we go to Thee?
We cannot guess Thee in the wood or hear Thee in the wind?
Our cedars must fall round us ere we see the light behind?
Ay sooth, we feel too strong, in weal, to need Thee on that road,
But woe being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on "God."'

Her mother could not speak for tears; she ever musèd thus,
'*The bees will find out other flowers*, — but what is left for *us?*'

But her young brother stayed his sobs and knelt beside her knee,
— 'Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast never a word for me?'
She passed her hand across his face, she pressed it on his cheek,
So tenderly, so tenderly — she needed not to speak.

The wreath which lay on shrine that day, at vespers bloomed no more.
The woman fair who placed it there had died an hour before.
Both perished mute for lack of root, earth's nourishment to reach.
O reader, breathe (the ballad saith) some sweetness out of each!

THE MOURNING MOTHER

(OF THE DEAD BLIND)

First printed as 'The Mournful Mother.'

I

Dost thou weep, mourning mother,
For thy blind boy in grave?
That no more with each other
Sweet counsel ye can have?
That he, left dark by nature,
Can never more be led
By thee, maternal creature,
Along smooth paths instead?
That thou canst no more show him
The sunshine, by the heat;
The river's silver flowing,
By murmurs at his feet?
The foliage, by its coolness;
The roses, by their smell;
And all creation's fulness,
By Love's invisible?
Weepest thou to behold not
His meek blind eyes again, —
Closed doorways which were folded,
And prayed against in vain —
And under which, sat smiling
The child-mouth evermore,
As one who watcheth, wiling
The time by, at a door?
And weepest thou to feel not
His clinging hand on thine —
Which now, at dream-time, will not
Its cold touch disentwine?
And weepest thou still ofter,

Oh, never more to mark
His low soft words, made softer
By speaking in the dark ?
Weep on, thou mourning mother !

II

But since to him when living,
Thou wast both sun and moon,
Look o'er his grave, surviving,
From a high sphere alone:
Sustain that exaltation,
Expand that tender light,
And hold in mother-passion
Thy Blessèd in thy sight.
See how he went out straightway
From the dark world he knew, —
No twilight in the gateway
To mediate 'twixt the two, —
Into the sudden glory,
Out of the dark he trod,
Departing from before thee
At once to light and God ! —
For the first face, beholding
The Christ's in its divine,
For the first place, the golden
And tideless hyaline,
With trees at lasting summer
That rock to songful sound,
While angels the new-comer
Wrap a still smile around.
Oh, in the blessèd psalm now,
His happy voice he tries,
Spreading a thicker palm-bough,
Than others, o'er his eyes !
Yet still, in all the singing,
Thinks haply of thy song
Which, in his life's first springing,
Sang to him all night long;
And wishes it beside him,
With kissing lips that cool
And soft did overglide him,
To make the sweetness full.
Look up, O mourning mother !
Thy blind boy walks in light:
Ye wait for one another
Before God's infinite.
But thou art now the darkest,
Thou mother left below —
Thou, the sole blind, — thou markest,
Content that it be so, —
Until ye two have meeting
Where Heaven's pearl-gate is,
And *he* shall lead thy feet in,
As once thou leddest *his*.
Wait on, thou mourning mother !

A VALEDICTION

God be with thee, my belovèd, — God be with thee !
Else alone thou goest forth,
Thy face unto the north,
Moor and pleasance all around thee and beneath thee
Looking equal in one snow;
While I, who try to reach thee,
Vainly follow, vainly follow
With the farewell and the hollo,
And cannot reach thee so.
Alas, I can but teach thee !
God be with thee, my belovèd, — God be with thee !

II

Can I teach thee, my belovèd, — can I teach thee ?
If I said, 'Go left or right,'
The counsel would be light,
The wisdom, poor of all that could enrich thee;
My right would show like left;
My raising would depress thee,
My choice of light would blind thee,
Of way — would leave behind thee,
Of end — would leave bereft.
Alas, I can but bless thee !
May God teach thee, my belovèd, — may God teach thee !

III

Can I bless thee, my belovèd, — can I bless thee ?
What blessing word can I
From mine own tears keep dry ?
What flowers grow in my field wherewith to dress thee ?
My good reverts to ill;
My calmnesses would move thee,
My softnesses would prick thee,
My bindings up would break thee,
My crownings curse and kill.
Alas, I can but love thee !
May God bless thee, my belovèd, — may God bless thee !

IV

Can I love thee, my belovèd, — can I love thee ?
And is *this* like love, to stand

With no help in my hand,
When strong as death I fain would watch above thee?
My love-kiss can deny
No tear that falls beneath it;
Mine oath of love can swear thee
From no ill that comes near thee,
And thou diest while I breathe it,
And *I* — I can but die!
May God love thee, my belovèd, — may God love thee!

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP

A ROMANCE OF THE AGE

A special interest attaches to this poem as the one which induced Robert Browning to seek Miss Barrett's acquaintance. She herself had been rather inclined to think lightly of it because it was, in some sense, written to order, and that with extraordinary rapidity. In a letter to H. S. Boyd, dated August 1, 1844, she gives the following account of its origin: 'Last Saturday, on its being discovered that my first volume consisted of only 208 pages, and my second of 280 pages, Mr. Moxon uttered a cry of reprehension . . . and wanted to tear away several poems from the end of the second volume, and tie them on to the end of the first! I could not and would not hear of this because I had set my heart on having 'Dead Pan' to conclude with. So there was nothing for it but to finish a ballad poem called 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' which was lying by me, and I did so by writing — i. e., composing, — one hundred and forty lines last Saturday. I seemed to be in a dream all day. Long lines, too, — fifteen syllables each!' Elsewhere she entreats Mr. Boyd never to tell anybody in what haste the poem was written. This highly colored rhymed romance of modern life proved far more attractive to the general reader than some of the more elaborate and more truly artistic pieces in the edition of 1844. It was also a special favorite both with Carlyle and Miss Martineau.

A Poet writes to his Friend. Place — *A Room in Wycombe Hall.* Time — *Late in the evening.*

I

Dear my friend and fellow-student, I would lean my spirit o'er you!
Down the purple of this chamber tears should scarcely run at will.
I am humbled who was humble. Friend, I bow my head before you:
You should lead me to my peasants, but their faces are too still.

II

There 's a lady, an earl's daughter, — she is proud and she is noble,
And she treads the crimson carpet and she breathes the perfumed air,
And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair.

III

She has halls among the woodlands, she has castles by the breakers,
She has farms and she has manors, she can threaten and command:
And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her acres,
As they mark upon the blasted heaven the measure of the land.

IV

There are none of England's daughters who can show a prouder presence;
Upon princely suitors' praying she has looked in her disdain.
She was sprung of English nobles, I was born of English peasants;
What was *I* that I should love her, save for competence to pain?

V

I was only a poor poet, made for singing at her casement,
As the finches or the thrushes, while she thought of other things.
Oh, she walked so high above me, she appeared to my abasement,
In her lovely silken murmur, like an angel clad in wings!

VI

Many vassals bow before her as her carriage sweeps their doorways;
She has blessed their little children, as a priest or queen were she:

Far too tender, or too cruel far, her smile upon the poor was,
For I thought it was the same smile which she used to smile on *me*.

VII

She has voters in the Commons, she has lovers in the palace,
And, of all the fair court-ladies, few have jewels half as fine;
Oft the Prince has named her beauty 'twixt the red wine and the chalice:
Oh, and what was *I* to love her? my beloved, my Geraldine!

VIII

Yet I could not choose but love her: I was born to poet-uses,
To love all things set above me, all of good and all of fair.
Nymphs of mountain, not of valley, we are wont to call the Muses;
And in nympholeptic climbing, poets pass from mount to star.

IX

And because I was a poet, and because the public praised me,
With a critical deduction for the modern writer's fault,
I could sit at rich men's tables, — though the courtesies that raised me,
Still suggested clear between us the pale spectrum of the salt.

X

And they praised me in her presence — 'Will your book appear this summer?'
Then returning to each other — 'Yes, our plans are for the moors.'
Then with whisper dropped behind me — 'There he is! the latest comer.
Oh, she only likes his verses! what is over, she endures.

XI

'Quite low-born, self-educated! somewhat gifted though by nature,
And we make a point of asking him, — of being very kind.
You may speak, he does not hear you! and, besides, he writes no satire, —
All these serpents kept by charmers leave the natural sting behind.'

XII

I grew scornfuller, grew colder, as I stood up there among them,
Till as frost intense will burn you, the cold scorning scorched my brow;
When a sudden silver speaking, gravely cadenced, over-rung them,
And a sudden silken stirring touched my inner nature through.

XIII

I looked upward and beheld her: with a calm and regnant spirit,
Slowly round she swept her eyelids, and said clear before them all —
'Have you such superfluous honor, sir, that able to confer it
You will come down, Mister Bertram, as my guest to Wycombe Hall?'

XIV

Here she paused; she had been paler at the first word of her speaking,
But, because a silence followed it, blushed somewhat, as for shame:
Then, as scorning her own feeling, resumed calmly — 'I am seeking
More distinction than these gentlemen think worthy of my claim.

XV

'Ne'ertheless, you see, I seek it — not because I am a woman,'
(Here her smile sprang like a fountain and, so, overflowed her mouth)
'But because my woods in Sussex have some purple shades at gloaming
Which are worthy of a king in state, or poet in his youth.

XVI

'I invite you, Mister Bertram, to no scene for worldly speeches —
Sir, I scarce should dare — but only where God asked the thrushes first:
And if *you* will sing beside them, in the covert of my beeches,
I will thank you for the woodlands, — for the human world, at worst.'

XVII

Then she smiled around right childly, then she gazed around right queenly,
And I bowed — I could not answer; alternated light and gloom —

While as one who quells the lions, with a
steady eye serenely,
She, with level fronting eyelids, passed out
stately from the room.

XVIII

Oh, the blessèd woods of Sussex, I can hear
them still around me,
With their leafy tide of greenery still rippling up the wind!
Oh, the cursèd woods of Sussex! where the
hunter's arrow found me,
When a fair face and a tender voice had
made me mad and blind!

XIX

In that ancient hall of Wycombe thronged
the numerous guests invited,
And the lovely London ladies trod the
floors with gliding feet;
And their voices low with fashion, not with
feeling, softly freighted
All the air about the windows with elastic
laughters sweet.

XX

For at eve the open windows flung their
light out on the terrace
Which the floating orbs of curtains did with
gradual shadow sweep,
While the swans upon the river, fed at
morning by the heiress,
Trembled downward through their snowy
wings at music in their sleep.

XXI

And there evermore was music, both of
instrument and singing,
Till the finches of the shrubberies grew
restless in the dark;
But the cedars stood up motionless, each in
a moonlight's ringing,
And the deer, half in the glimmer, strewed
the hollows of the park.

XXII

And though sometimes she would bind me
with her silver-corded speeches
To commix my words and laughter with
the converse and the jest,
Oft I sat apart and, gazing on the river
through the beeches,
Heard, as pure the swans swam down it,
her pure voice o'erfloat the rest.

XXIII

In the morning, horn of huntsman, hoof of
steed and laugh of rider,
Spread out cheery from the courtyard till
we lost them in the hills,
While herself and other ladies, and her
suitors left beside her,
Went a-wandering up the gardens through
the laurels and abeles.

XXIV

Thus, her foot upon the new-mown grass,
bareheaded, with the flowing
Of the virginal white vesture gathered
closely to her throat,
And the golden ringlets in her neck just
quickened by her going,
And appearing to breathe sun for air, and
doubting if to float, —

XXV

With a bunch of dewy maple, which her
right hand held above her,
And which trembled a green shadow in betwixt her and the skies,
As she turned her face in going, thus, she
drew me on to love her,
And to worship the divineness of the smile
hid in her eyes.

XXVI

For her eyes alone smile constantly; her
lips have serious sweetness,
And her front is calm, the dimple rarely
ripples on the cheek;
But her deep blue eyes smile constantly, as
if they in discreetness
Kept the secret of a happy dream she did
not care to speak.

XXVII

Thus she drew me the first morning, out
across into the garden,
And I walked among her noble friends and
could not keep behind.
Spake she unto all and unto me — 'Behold,
I am the warden
Of the song-birds in these lindens, which
are cages to their mind.

XXVIII

'But within this swarded circle into which
the lime-walk brings us,
Whence the beeches, rounded greenly, stand
away in reverent fear,

I will let no music enter, saving what the fountain sings us
Which the lilies round the basin may seem pure enough to hear.

XXIX

'The live air that waves the lilies waves the slender jet of water
Like a holy thought sent feebly up from soul of fasting saint:
Whereby lies a marble Silence, sleeping (Lough the sculptor wrought her),
So asleep she is forgetting to say Hush! — a fancy quaint.

XXX

'Mark how heavy white her eyelids! not a dream between them lingers;
And the left hand's index droppeth from the lips upon the cheek:
While the right hand, — with the symbol-rose held slack within the fingers, —
Has fallen backward in the basin — yet this Silence will not speak!

XXXI

'That the essential meaning growing may exceed the special symbol,
Is the thought as I conceive it: it applies more high and low.
Our true noblemen will often through right nobleness grow humble,
And assert an inward honor by denying outward show.'

XXXII

'Nay, your Silence,' said I, 'truly, holds her symbol-rose but slackly,
Yet *she holds it*, or would scarcely be a Silence to our ken:
And your nobles wear their ermine on the outside, or walk blackly
In the presence of the social law as mere ignoble men.

XXXIII

'Let the poets dream such dreaming! madam, in these British islands
'T is the substance that wanes ever, 't is the symbol that exceeds.
Soon we shall have nought but symbol: and, for statues like this Silence,
Shall accept the rose's image — in another case, the weed's.'

XXXIV

'Not so quickly,' she retorted, — 'I confess, where'er you go, you
Find for things, names — shows for actions, and pure gold for honor clear:
But when all is run to symbol in the Social, I will throw you
The world's book which now reads dryly, and sit down with Silence here.'

XXXV

Half in playfulness she spoke, I thought, and half in indignation;
Friends, who listened, laughed her words off, while her lovers deemed her fair:
A fair woman, flushed with feeling, in her noble-lighted station
Near the statue's white reposing — and both bathed in sunny air!

XXXVI

With the trees round, not so distant but you heard their vernal murmur,
And beheld in light and shadow the leaves in and outward move,
And the little fountain leaping toward the sun-heart to be warmer,
Then recoiling in a tremble from the too much light above.

XXXVII

'T is a picture for remembrance. And thus, morning after morning,
Did I follow as she drew me by the spirit to her feet.
Why, her greyhound followed also! dogs — we both were dogs for scorning —
To be sent back when she pleased it and her path lay through the wheat.

XXXVIII

And thus, morning after morning, spite of vows and spite of sorrow,
Did I follow at her drawing, while the week-days passed along, —
Just to feed the swans this noontide, or to see the fawns to-morrow,
Or to teach the hill-side echo some sweet Tuscan in a song.

XXXIX

Ay, for sometimes on the hill-side, while we sate down in the gowans,
With the forest green behind us and its shadow cast before,

And the river running under, and across it
from the rowans
A brown partridge whirring near us till we
felt the air it bore, —

XL

There, obedient to her praying, did I read
aloud the poems
Made to Tuscan flutes, or instruments
more various of our own;
Read the pastoral parts of Spenser, or the
subtle interflowings
Found in Petrarch's sonnets — here 's the
book, the leaf is folded down!

XLI

Or at times a modern volume, Wordsworth's
solemn-thoughted idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's enchanted
reverie, —
Or from Browning some 'Pomegranate,'
which, if cut deep down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured, of a
veined humanity.

XLII

Or at times I read there, hoarsely, some
new poem of my making:
Poets ever fail in reading their own verses
to their worth,
For the echo in you breaks upon the words
which you are speaking,
And the chariot wheels jar in the gate
through which you drive them forth.

XLIII

After, when we were grown tired of books,
the silence round us flinging
A slow arm of sweet compression, felt with
beatings at the breast,
She would break out on a sudden in a gush
of woodland singing,
Like a child's emotion in a god — a naiad
tired of rest.

XLIV

Oh, to see or hear her singing! scarce I
know which is divinest,
For her looks sing too — she modulates
her gestures on the tune,
And her mouth stirs with the song, like
song; and when the notes are finest,
'T is the eyes that shoot out vocal light
and seem to swell them on.

XLV

Then we talked — oh, how we talked!
her voice, so cadenced in the talking,
Made another singing — of the soul! a
music without bars:
While the leafy sounds of woodlands, humming
round where we were walking,
Brought interposition worthy-sweet, — as
skies about the stars.

XLVI

And she spake such good thoughts natural,
as if she always thought them;
She had sympathies so rapid, open, free as
bird on branch,
Just as ready to fly east as west, whichever
way besought them,
In the birchen-wood a chirrup, or a cockcrow
in the grange.

XLVII

In her utmost lightness there is truth —
and often she speaks lightly,
Has a grace in being gay which even
mournful souls approve,
For the root of some grave earnest thought
is understruck so rightly
As to justify the foliage and the waving
flowers above.

XLVIII

And she talked on — *we* talked, rather!
upon all things, substance, shadow,
Of the sheep that browsed the grasses, of
the reapers in the corn,
Of the little children from the schools, seen
winding through the meadow,
Of the poor rich world beyond them, still
kept poorer by its scorn.

XLIX

So, of men, and so, of letters — books are
men of higher stature,
And the only men that speak aloud for
future times to hear;
So, of mankind in the abstract, which
grows slowly into nature,
Yet will lift the cry of 'progress,' as it
trod from sphere to sphere.

L

And her custom was to praise me when I
said, — 'The Age culls simples,
With a broad clown's back turned broadly
to the glory of the stars.

We are gods by our own reck'ning, and may well shut up the temples,
And wield on, amid the incense-steam, the thunder of our cars.

LI

'For we throw out acclamations of self-thanking, self-admiring,
With, at every mile run faster,—"O the wondrous wondrous age!"
Little thinking if we work our SOULS as nobly as our iron,
Or if angels will commend us at the goal of pilgrimage.

LII

'Why, what *is* this patient entrance into nature's deep resources
But the child's most gradual learning to walk upright without bane!
When we drive out, from the cloud of steam, majestical white horses,
Are we greater than the first men who led black ones by the mane?

LIII

'If we trod the deeps of ocean, if we struck the stars in rising,
If we wrapped the globe intensely with one hot electric breath,
'T were but power within our tether, no new spirit-power comprising,
And in life we were not greater men, nor bolder men in death.'

LIV

She was patient with my talking; and I loved her, loved her certes
As I loved all heavenly objects, with uplifted eyes and hands;
As I loved pure inspirations, loved the graces, loved the virtues,
In a Love content with writing his own name on desert sands.

LV

Or at least I thought so, purely; thought no idiot Hope was raising
Any crown to crown Love's silence, silent Love that sate alone:
Out, alas! the stag is like me, he that tries to go on grazing
With the great deep gun-wound in his neck, then reels with sudden moan.

LVI

It was thus I reeled. I told you that her hand had many suitors;
But she smiles them down imperially as Venus did the waves,
And with such a gracious coldness that they cannot press their futures
On the present of her courtesy, which yieldingly enslaves.

LVII

And this morning as I sat alone within the inner chamber
With the great saloon beyond it, lost in pleasant thought serene,
For I had been reading Camoëns, that poem you remember,
Which his lady's eyes are praised in as the sweetest ever seen.

LVIII

And the book lay open, and my thought flew from it, taking from it
A vibration and impulsion to an end beyond its own,
As the branch of a green osier, when a child would overcome it,
Springs up freely from his claspings and goes swinging in the sun.

LIX

As I mused I heard a murmur; it grew deep as it grew longer,
Speakers using earnest language—'Lady Geraldine, you *would!*'
And I heard a voice that pleaded, ever on in accents stronger,
As a sense of reason gave it power to make its rhetoric good.

LX

Well I knew that voice; it was an earl's, of soul that matched his station,
Soul completed into lordship, might and right read on his brow;
Very finely courteous; far too proud to doubt his domination
Of the common people, he atones for grandeur by a bow.

LXI

High straight forehead, nose of eagle, cold blue eyes of less expression
Than resistance, coldly casting off the looks of other men,

As steel, arrows; unelastic lips which seem
to taste possession
And be cautious lest the common air should
injure or distrain.

LXII

For the rest, accomplished, upright, — ay,
and standing by his order
With a bearing not ungraceful; fond of
art and letters too;
Just a good man made a proud man, — as
the sandy rocks that border
A wild coast, by circumstances, in a regnant
ebb and flow.

LXIII

Thus I knew that voice, I heard it, and I
could not help the hearkening:
In the room I stood up blindly, and my
burning heart within
Seemed to seethe and fuse my senses till
they ran on all sides darkening,
And scorched, weighed like melted metal
round my feet that stood therein.

LXIV

And that voice, I heard it pleading, for
love's sake, for wealth, position,
For the sake of liberal uses and great actions to be done:
And she interrupted gently, 'Nay, my
lord, the old tradition
Of your Normans, by some worthier hand
than mine is, should be won.'

LXV

'Ah, that white hand!' he said quickly, —
and in his he either drew it
Or attempted — for with gravity and instance she replied,
'Nay, indeed, my lord, this talk is vain,
and we had best eschew it
And pass on, like friends, to other points
less easy to decide.'

LXVI

What he said again, I know not: it is
likely that his trouble
Worked his pride up to the surface, for
she answered in slow scorn,
'And your lordship judges rightly. Whom
I marry shall be noble,
Ay, and wealthy. I shall never blush to
think how he was born.'

LXVII

There, I maddened! her words stung me.
Life swept through me into fever,
And my soul sprang up astonished, sprang
full-statured in an hour.
Know you what it is when anguish, with
apocalyptic NEVER,
To a Pythian height dilates you, and despair sublimes to power?

LXVIII

From my brain the soul-wings budded,
waved a flame about my body,
Whence conventions coiled to ashes. I felt
self-drawn out, as man,
From amalgamate false natures, and I saw
the skies grow ruddy
With the deepening feet of angels, and I
knew what spirits can.

LXIX

I was mad, inspired — say either! (anguish
worketh inspiration)
Was a man or beast — perhaps so, for the
tiger roars when speared;
And I walked on, step by step along the
level of my passion —
Oh my soul! and passed the doorway to
her face, and never feared.

LXX

He had left her, peradventure, when my
footstep proved my coming,
But for *her* — she half arose, then sate,
grew scarlet and grew pale.
Oh, she trembled! 't is so always with a
worldly man or woman
In the presence of true spirits; what else
can they do but quail?

LXXI

Oh, she fluttered like a tame bird, in among
its forest brothers
Far too strong for it; then drooping, bowed
her face upon her hands;
And I spake out wildly, fiercely, brutal
truths of her and others:
I, she planted in the desert, swathed her,
windlike, with my sands.

LXXII

I plucked up her social fictions, bloody-rooted though leaf-verdant,
Trod them down with words of shaming, —
all the purple and the gold.

All the 'landed stakes' and lordships, all that spirits pure and ardent
Are cast out of love and honor because chancing not to hold.

LXXIII

'For myself I do not argue,' said I, 'though I love you, madam,
But for better souls that nearer to the height of yours have trod:
And this age shows, to my thinking, still more infidels to Adam
Than directly, by profession, simple infidels to God.

LXXIV

'Yet, O God,' I said, 'O grave,' I said, O mother's heart and bosom,
With whom first and last are equal, saint and corpse and little child!
We are fools to your deductions, in these figments of heart-closing;
We are traitors to your causes, in these sympathies defiled.

LXXV

'Learn more reverence, madam, not for rank or wealth — *that* needs no learning:
That comes quickly, quick as sin does, ay, and culminates to sin;
But for Adam's seed, MAN! Trust me, 't is a clay above your scorning,
With God's image stamped upon it, and God's kindling breath within.

LXXVI

'What right have you, madam, gazing your palace mirror daily,
Getting so by heart your beauty which all others must adore,
While you draw the golden ringlets down your fingers, to vow gaily
You will wed no man that 's only good to God, and nothing more?

LXXXVII

'Why, what right have you, made fair by that same God, the sweetest woman
Of all women He has fashioned, with your lovely spirit-face
Which would seem too near to vanish if its smile were not so human,
And your voice of holy sweetness, turning common words to grace, —

LXXVIII

'What right *can* you have, God's other works to scorn, despise, revile them
In the gross, as mere men, broadly — not as *noble* men, forsooth, —
As mere Pariahs of the outer world, forbidden to assoil them
In the hope of living, dying, near that sweetness of your mouth?

LXXIX

'Have you any answer, madam? If my spirit were less earthly,
If its instrument were gifted with a better silver string,
I would kneel down where I stand, and say — Behold me! I am worthy
Of thy loving, for I love thee. I am worthy as a king.

LXXX

'As it is — your ermined pride, I swear, shall feel this stain upon her,
That *I*, poor, weak, tost with passion, scorned by me and you again,
Love you, madam, dare to love you, to my grief and your dishonor,
To my endless desolation, and your impotent disdain!'

LXXXI

More mad words like these — mere madness! friend, I need not write them fuller,
For I hear my hot soul dropping on the lines in showers of tears.
Oh, a woman! friend, a woman! why, a beast had scarce been duller
Than roar bestial loud complaints against the shining of the spheres.

LXXXII

But at last there came a pause. I stood all vibrating with thunder
Which my soul had used. The silence drew her face up like a call.
Could you guess what word she uttered? She looked up, as if in wonder,
With tears beaded on her lashes, and said — 'Bertram!' — It was all.

LXXXIII

If she had cursed me, and she might have, or if even, with queenly bearing
Which at need is used by women, she had risen up and said,

'Sir, you are my guest, and therefore I have given you a full hearing:
Now, beseech you, choose a name exacting somewhat less, instead!'—

LXXXIV

I had borne it: but that 'Bertram'—why, it lies there on the paper
A mere word, without her accent, and you cannot judge the weight
Of the calm which crushed my passion: I seemed drowning in a vapor;
And her gentleness destroyed me whom her scorn made desolate.

LXXXV

So, struck backward and exhausted by that inward flow of passion
Which had rushed on, sparing nothing, into forms of abstract truth,
By a logic agonizing through unseemly demonstration,
And by youth's own anguish turning grimly gray the hairs of youth,—

LXXXVI

By the sense accursed and instant, that if even I spake wisely
I spake basely—using truth, if what I spake indeed was true,
To avenge wrong on a woman—*her*, who sate there weighing nicely
A poor manhood's worth, found guilty of such deeds as I could do!—

LXXXVII

By such wrong and woe exhausted—what I suffered and occasioned,—
As a wild horse through a city runs with lightning in his eyes,
And then dashing at a church's cold and passive wall, impassioned,
Strikes the death into his burning brain, and blindly drops and dies—

LXXXVIII

So I fell, struck down before her—do you blame me, friend, for weakness?
'T was my strength of passion slew me!—fell before her like a stone;
Fast the dreadful world rolled from me on its roaring wheels of blackness:
When the light came I was lying in this chamber and alone.

LXXXIX

Oh, of course she charged her lacqueys to bear out the sickly burden,
And to cast it from her scornful sight, but not *beyond* the gate;
She is too kind to be cruel, and too haughty not to pardon
Such a man as I; 't were something to be level to her hate.

XC

But for me—you now are conscious why, my friend, I write this letter,
How my life is read all backward, and the charm of life undone.
I shall leave her house at dawn; I would to-night, if I were better—
And I charge my soul to hold my body strengthened for the sun.

XCI

When the sun has dyed the oriel, I depart, with no last gazes,
No weak moanings (one word only, left in writing for her hands),
Out of reach of all derision, and some unavailing praises,
To make front against this anguish in the far and foreign lands.

XCII

Blame me not. I would not squander life in grief—I am abstemious.
I but nurse my spirit's falcon that its wing may soar again.
There 's no room for tears of weakness in the blind eyes of a Phemius:
Into work the poet kneads them, and he does not die *till then*.

CONCLUSION

I

Bertram finished the last pages, while along the silence ever
Still in hot and heavy splashes fell the tears on every leaf.
Having ended, he leans backward in his chair, with lips that quiver
From the deep unspoken, ay, and deep unwritten thoughts of grief.

II

Soh ! how still the lady standeth ! 'T is a dream — a dream of mercies !
'Twixt the purple lattice-curtains how she standeth still and pale !
'T is a vision, sure, of mercies, sent to soften his self-curses,
Sent to sweep a patient quiet o'er the tossing of his wail.

III

'Eyes,' he said, 'now throbbing through me ! are ye eyes that did undo me ?
Shining eyes, like antique jewels set in Parian statue-stone !
Underneath that calm white forehead are ye ever burning torrid
O'er the desolate sand-desert of my heart and life undone ?'

IV

With a murmurous stir uncertain, in the air the purple curtain
Swelleth in and swelleth out around her motionless pale brows,
While the gliding of the river sends a rippling noise for ever
Through the open casement whitened by the moonlight's slant repose.

V

Said he — 'Vision of a lady ! stand there silent, stand there steady !
Now I see it plainly, plainly now I cannot hope or doubt —
There, the brows of mild repression — there, the lips of silent passion,
Curvèd like an archer's bow to send the bitter arrows out.'

VI

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
And approached him slowly, slowly, in a gliding measured pace;
With her two white hands extended as if praying one offended,
And a look of supplication gazing earnest in his face.

VII

Said he — 'Wake me by no gesture, — sound of breath, or stir of vesture !
Let the blessèd apparition melt not yet to its divine !
No approaching — hush, no breathing ! or my heart must swoon to death in
The too utter life thou bringest, O thou dream of Geraldine !'

VIII

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
But the tears ran over lightly from her eyes and tenderly: —
'Dost thou, Bertram, truly love me? Is no woman far above me
Found more worthy of thy poet-heart than such a one as *I* ?'

IX

Said he — 'I would dream so ever, like the flowing of that river,
Flowing ever in a shadow greenly onward to the sea !
So, thou vision of all sweetness, princely to a full completeness
Would my heart and life flow onward, deathward, through this dream of THEE !'

X

Ever, evermore the while in a slow silence she kept smiling,
While the silver tears ran faster down the blushing of her cheeks;
Then with both her hands enfolding both of his, she softly told him,
'Bertram, if I say I love thee, . . . 't is the vision only speaks.'

XI

Softened, quickened to adore her, on his knee he fell before her,
And she whispered low in triumph, 'It shall be as I have sworn.
Very rich he is in virtues, very noble — noble, certes;
And I shall not blush in knowing that men call him lowly born.'

A VISION OF POETS

On September 19, 1843, Miss Barrett wrote to her stanch friend and valued literary counsellor, Hugh Stuart Boyd : 'I have just finished a poem of some eight hundred lines called "A Vision of Poets ;" — philosophical, allegorical, anything but popular. It is in stanzas every one an octosyllabic triplet, which you will think odd, and I have not *sanguinity* enough to defend.' Elsewhere she explained that the object of the poem was to indicate 'the necessary relations of genius to suffering and self-sacrifice.' To Robert Browning, at least, the 'Vision of Poets' needed neither defence nor elucidation. Words appear almost to have failed him for the adequate expression of his enthusiasm, when he wrote to his *fiancée* on Sunday evening, August 4, 1845: 'Let me say how perfect, absolutely perfect, are those three or four pages in the Vision which present the Poets: — a line, a few words and the man there — one twang of the bow, and the arrow-head in the white — Shelley's "white ideal all statue-blind" is perfect — how can I coin words? And dear deaf old Hesiod, and all, all — are perfect — perfect.'

> 'O Sacred Essence, lighting me this hour,
> How may I lightly stile thy great power?
> *Echo.* Power.
> Power! but of whence? under the greenwood spraye?
> Or liv'st in Heaven? saye.
> *Echo.* In Heavens aye.
> In Heavens aye! tell, may I it obtayne
> By alms, by fasting, prayer, — by paine?
> *Echo.* By paine.
> Show me the paine, it shall be undergone:
> I to mine end will still go on.
> *Echo.* Go on.'
> — *Britannia's Pastorals.*

A POET could not sleep aright,
For his soul kept up too much light
Under his eyelids for the night.

And thus he rose disquieted
With sweet rhymes ringing through his head,
And in the forest wanderèd

Where, sloping up the darkest glades,
The moon had drawn long colonnades
Upon whose floor the verdure fades

To a faint silver: pavement fair,
The antique wood-nymphs scarce would dare
To foot-print o'er, had such been there,

And rather sit by breathlessly,
With fear in their large eyes, to see
The consecrated sight. But HE —

The poet who, with spirit-kiss
Familiar, had long claimed for his
Whatever earthly beauty is,

Who also in his spirit bore
A beauty passing the earth's store, —
Walked calmly onward evermore.

His aimless thoughts in metre went,
Like a babe's hand without intent
Drawn down a seven-stringed instrument:

Nor jarred it with his humor as,
With a faint stirring of the grass,
An apparition fair did pass.

He might have feared another time,
But all things fair and strange did chime
With his thoughts then, as rhyme to rhyme.

An angel had not startled him,
Alighted from heaven's burning rim
To breathe from glory in the Dim;

Much less a lady riding slow
Upon a palfrey white as snow,
And smooth as a snow-cloud could go.

Full upon his she turned her face,
'What ho, sir poet! dost thou pace
Our woods at night in ghostly chase

'Of some fair Dryad of old tales
Who chants between the nightingales
And over sleep by song prevails?'

She smiled; but he could see arise
Her soul from far adown her eyes,
Prepared as if for sacrifice.

She looked a queen who seemeth gay
From royal grace alone. 'Now, nay,'
He answered, 'slumber passed away,

'Compelled by instincts in my head
That I should see to-night, instead
Of a fair nymph, some fairer Dread.'

She looked up quickly to the sky
And spake: 'The moon's regality
Will hear no praise; She is as I.

'She is in heaven, and I on earth;
This is my kingdom: I come forth
To crown all poets to their worth.'

He brake in with a voice that mourned;
'To their worth, lady? They are scorned
By men they sing for, till inurned.

'To their worth? Beauty in the mind
Leaves the hearth cold, and love-refined
Ambitions make the world unkind.

'The boor who ploughs the daisy down,
The chief whose mortgage of renown,
Fixed upon graves, has bought a crown —

'Both these are happier, more approved
Than poets! — why should I be moved
In saying, both are more beloved?'

'The south can judge not of the north,'
She resumed calmly; 'I come forth
To crown all poets to their worth.

'Yea, verily, to anoint them all
With blessèd oils which surely shall
Smell sweeter as the ages fall.'

'As sweet,' the poet said, and rung
A low sad laugh, 'as flowers are, sprung
Out of their graves when they die young;

'As sweet as window-eglantine,
Some bough of which, as they decline,
The hired nurse gathers at their sign:

'As sweet, in short, as perfumed shroud
Which the gay Roman maidens sewed
For English Keats, singing aloud.'

The lady answered, 'Yea, as sweet!
The things thou namest being complete
In fragrance, as I measure it.

'Since sweet the death-clothes and the knell
Of him who having lived, dies well;
And wholly sweet the asphodel

'Stirred softly by that foot of his,
When he treads brave on all that is,
Into the world of souls, from this.

'Since sweet the tears, dropped at the door
Of tearless Death, and even before:
Sweet, consecrated evermore.

'What, dost thou judge it a strange thing
That poets, crowned for vanquishing,
Should bear some dust from out the ring?

'Come on with me, come on with me,
And learn in coming: let me free
Thy spirit into verity.'

She ceased: her palfrey's paces sent
No separate noises as she went;
'T was a bee's hum, a little spent.

And while the poet seemed to tread
Along the drowsy noise so made,
The forest heaved up overhead

Its billowy foliage through the air,
And the calm stars did far and spare
O'erswim the masses everywhere;

Save when the overtopping pines
Did bar their tremulous light with lines
All fixed and black. Now the moon shines

A broader glory. You may see
The trees grow rarer presently;
The air blows up more fresh and free:

Until they come from dark to light,
And from the forest to the sight
Of the large heaven-heart, bare with night,

A fiery throb in every star,
Those burning arteries that are
The conduits of God's life afar, —

A wild brown moorland underneath,
And four pools breaking up the heath
With white low gleamings, blank as death.

Beside the first pool, near the wood,
A dead tree in set horror stood,
Peeled and disjointed, stark as rood;

Since thunder-stricken, years ago,
Fixed in the spectral strain and throe
Wherewith it struggled from the blow:

A monumental tree, alone,
That will not bend in storms, nor groan,
But break off sudden like a stone.

Its lifeless shadow lies oblique
Upon the pool where, javelin-like,
The star-rays quiver while they strike.

'Drink,' said the lady, very still —
'Be holy and cold.' He did her will
And drank the starry water chill.

The next pool they came near unto
Was bare of trees; there, only grew
Straight flags, and lilies just a few

Which sullen on the water sate
And leant their faces on the flat,
As weary of the starlight-state.

'Drink,' said the lady, grave and slow —
'*World's use* behoveth thee to know.'
He drank the bitter wave below.

The third pool, girt with thorny bushes
And flaunting weeds and reeds and rushes
That winds sang through in mournful gushes,

Was whitely smeared in many a round
By a slow slime; the starlight swound
Over the ghastly light it found.

'Drink,' said the lady, sad and slow —
'*World's love* behoveth thee to know.'
He looked to her commanding so;

Her brow was troubled, but her eye
Struck clear to his soul. For all reply
He drank the water suddenly, —

Then, with a deathly sickness, passed
Beside the fourth pool and the last,
Where weights of shadow were downcast

From yew and alder and rank trails
Of nightshade clasping the trunk-scales
And flung across the intervals

From yew to yew: who dares to stoop
Where those dank branches overdroop,
Into his heart the chill strikes up;

He hears a silent gliding coil,
The snakes strain hard against the soil,
His foot slips in their slimy oil,

And toads seem crawling on his hand,
And clinging bats but dimly scanned
Full in his face their wings expand.

A paleness took the poet's cheek:
'Must I drink *here?*' he seemed to seek
The lady's will with utterance meek:

'Ay, ay,' she said, 'it so must be;'
(And this time she spake cheerfully)
'Behoves thee know *World's cruelty.*'

He bowed his forehead till his mouth
Curved in the wave, and drank unloth
As if from rivers of the south;

His lips sobbed through the water rank,
His heart paused in him while he drank,
His brain beat heart-like, rose and sank,

And he swooned backward to a dream
Wherein he lay 'twixt gloom and gleam,
With Death and Life at each extreme:

And spiritual thunders, born of soul
Not cloud, did leap from mystic pole
And o'er him roll and counter-roll,

Crushing their echoes reboant
With their own wheels. Did Heaven so grant
His spirit a sign of covenant?

At last came silence. A slow kiss
Did crown his forehead after this;
His eyelids flew back for the bliss —

The lady stood beside his head,
Smiling a thought, with hair dispread;
The moonshine seemed dishevellèd

In her sleek tresses manifold
Like Danae's in the rain of old
That dripped with melancholy gold:

But SHE was holy, pale and high
As one who saw an ecstasy
Beyond a foretold agony.

'Rise up!' said she with voice where song
Eddied through speech, 'rise up; be strong:
And learn how right avenges wrong.'

The poet rose up on his feet:
He stood before an altar set
For sacrament with vessels meet

And mystic altar-lights which shine
As if their flames were crystalline
Carved flames that would not shrink or pine.

The altar filled the central place
Of a great church, and toward its face
Long aisles did shoot and interlace,

And from it a continuous mist
Of incense (round the edges kissed
By a yellow light of amethyst)

Wound upward slowly and throbbingly,
Cloud within cloud, right silverly,
Cloud above cloud, victoriously, —

Broke full against the archèd roof
And thence refracting eddied off
And floated through the marble woof

Of many a fine-wrought architrave,
Then, poising its white masses brave,
Swept solemnly down aisle and nave

Where, now in dark and now in light,
The countless columns, glimmering white,
Seemed leading out to the Infinite:

Plunged halfway up the shaft, they showed
In that pale shifting incense-cloud
Which flowed them by and overflowed

Till mist and marble seemed to blend,
And the whole temple, at the end,
With its own incense to distend, —

The arches like a giant's bow
To bend and slacken, — and below,
The nichèd saints to come and go:

Alone amid the shifting scene
That central altar stood serene
In its clear steadfast taper-sheen.

Then first, the poet was aware
Of a chief angel standing there
Before that altar, in the glare.

His eyes were dreadful, for you saw
That *they* saw God; his lips and jaw
Grand-made and strong, as Sinai's Law

They could enunciate and refrain
From vibratory after-pain,
And his brow's height was sovereign.

On the vast background of his wings
Rises his image, and he flings
From each plumed arc pale glitterings

And fiery flakes (as beateth, more
Or less, the angel-heart) before
And round him upon roof and floor,

Edging with fire the shifting fumes,
While at his side 'twixt lights and glooms
The phantasm of an organ booms.

Extending from which instrument
And angel, right and left-way bent,
The poet's sight grew sentient

Of a strange company around
And toward the altar; pale and bound
With bay above the eyes profound.

Deathful their faces were, and yet
The power of life was in them set —
Never forgot nor to forget:

Sublime significance of mouth,
Dilated nostril full of youth,
And forehead royal with the truth.

These faces were not multiplied
Beyond your count, but side by side
Did front the altar, glorified,

Still as a vision, yet exprest
Full as an action — look and geste
Of buried saint in risen rest.

The poet knew them. Faint and dim
His spirits seemed to sink in him —
Then, like a dolphin, change and swim

The current: these were poets true,
Who died for Beauty as martyrs do
For Truth — the ends being scarcely two.

God's prophets of the Beautiful
These poets were; of iron rule,
The rugged cilix, serge of wool.

Here Homer, with a broad suspense
Of thunderous brows, and lips intense
Of garrulous god-innocence.

There Shakespeare, on whose forehead climb
The crowns o' the world: O eyes sublime
With tears and laughters for all time!

Here Æschylus, the women swooned
To see so awful, when he frowned
As the gods did: he standeth crowned

Euripides, with close and mild
Scholastic lips, that could be wild
And laugh or sob out like a child

Even in the classes. Sophocles,
With that king's-look which down the trees
Followed the dark effigies

Of the lost Theban. Hesiod old,
Who, somewhat blind and deaf and cold,
Cared most for gods and bulls. And bold

Electric Pindar, quick as fear,
With race-dust on his cheeks, and clear
Slant startled eyes that seem to hear

The chariot rounding the last goal,
To hurtle past it in his soul.
And Sappho, with that gloriole

Of ebon hair on calmèd brows —
O poet-woman ! none foregoes
The leap, attaining the repose.

Theocritus, with glittering locks
Dropped sideway, as betwixt the rocks
He watched the visionary flocks.

And Aristophanes, who took
The world with mirth, and laughter-struck
The hollow caves of Thought and woke

The infinite echoes hid in each.
And Virgil: shade of Mantuan beech
Did help the shade of bay to reach

And knit around his forehead high:
For his gods wore less majesty
Than his brown bees hummed deathlessly.

Lucretius, nobler than his mood,
Who dropped his plummet down the broad
Deep universe and said 'No God — '

Finding no bottom: he denied
Divinely the divine, and died
Chief poet on the Tiber-side

By grace of God: his face is stern
As one compelled, in spite of scorn,
To teach a truth he would not learn.

And Ossian, dimly seen or guessed;
Once counted greater than the rest,
When mountain-winds blew out his vest.

And Spenser drooped his dreaming head
(With languid sleep-smile you had said
From his own verse engenderèd)

On Ariosto's, till they ran
Their curls in one: the Italian
Shot nimbler heat of bolder man

From his fine lids. And Dante stern
And sweet, whose spirit was an urn
For wine and milk poured out in turn.

Hard-souled Alfieri; and fancy-willed
Boiardo, who with laughter filled
The pauses of the jostled shield.

And Berni, with a hand stretched out
To sleek that storm. And, not without
The wreath he died in and the doubt

He died by, Tasso, bard and lover,
Whose visions were too thin to cover
The face of a false woman over.

And soft Racine; and grave Corneille,
The orator of rhymes, whose wail
Scarce shook his purple. And Petrarch pale,

From whose brain-lighted heart were thrown
A thousand thoughts beneath the sun,
Each lucid with the name of One.

And Camoens, with that look he had,
Compelling India's Genius sad
From the wave through the Lusiad, —

The murmurs of the storm-cape ocean
Indrawn in vibrative emotion
Along the verse. And, while devotion

In his wild eyes fantastic shone
Under the tonsure blown upon
By airs celestial, Calderon.

And bold De Vega, who breathed quick
Verse after verse, till death's old trick
Put pause to life and rhetoric.

And Goethe, with that reaching eye
His soul reached out from, far and high,
And fell from inner entity.

And Schiller, with heroic front
Worthy of Plutarch's kiss upon 't,
Too large for wreath of modern wont.

And Chaucer, with his infantine
Familiar clasp of things divine;
That mark upon his lip is wine.

Here, Milton's eyes strike piercing-dim:
The shapes of suns and stars did swim
Like clouds from them, and granted him

God for sole vision. Cowley, there,
Whose active fancy debonair
Drew straws like amber — foul to fair.

Drayton and Browne, with smiles they drew
From outward nature, still kept new
From their own inward nature true.

And Marlowe, Webster, Fletcher, Ben,
Whose fire-hearts sowed our furrows when
The world was worthy of such men.

And Burns, with pungent passionings
Set in his eyes: deep lyric springs
Are of the fire-mount's issuings.

And Shelley, in his white ideal,
All statue-blind. And Keats the real
Adonis with the hymeneal

Fresh vernal buds half sunk between
His youthful curls, kissed straight and sheen
In his Rome-grave, by Venus queen.

And poor, proud Byron, sad as grave
And salt as life; forlornly brave,
And quivering with the dart he drave.

And visionary Coleridge, who
Did sweep his thoughts as angels do
Their wings with cadence up the Blue.

These poets faced (and many more)
The lighted altar looming o'er
The clouds of incense dim and hoar:

And all their faces, in the lull
Of natural things, looked wonderful
With life and death and deathless rule.

All, still as stone and yet intense;
As if by spirit's vehemence
That stone were carved and not by sense.

But where the heart of each should beat,
There seemed a wound instead of it,
From whence the blood dropped to their feet

Drop after drop — dropped heavily
As century follows century
Into the deep eternity.

Then said the lady — and her word
Came distant, as wide waves were stirred
Between her and the ear that heard, —

'*World's use* is cold, *world's love* is vain,
World's cruelty is bitter bane,
But pain is not the fruit of pain.

'Hearken, O poet, whom I led
From the dark wood: dismissing dread,
Now hear this angel in my stead.

'His organ's clavier strikes along
These poets' hearts, sonorous, strong,
They gave him without count of wrong, —

'A diapason whence to guide
Up to God's feet, from these who died,
An anthem fully glorified —

'Whereat God's blessing, IBARAK (יברך)
Breathes back this music, folds it back
About the earth in vapory rack,

'And men walk in it, crying "Lo
The world is wider, and we know
The very heavens look brighter so:

'"The stars move statelier round the edge
Of the silver spheres, and give in pledge
Their light for nobler privilege:

'"No little flower but joys or grieves,
Full life is rustling in the sheaves,
Full spirit sweeps the forest-leaves."

'So works this music on the earth,
God so admits it, sends it forth
To add another worth to worth —

'A new creation-bloom that rounds
The old creation and expounds
His Beautiful in tuneful sounds.

'Now hearken!' Then the poet gazed
Upon the angel glorious-faced
Whose hand, majestically raised,

Floated across the organ-keys,
Like a pale moon o'er murmuring seas,
With no touch but with influences:

Then rose and fell (with swell and swound
Of shapeless noises wandering round
A concord which at last they found)

Those mystic keys: the tones were mixed,
Dim, faint, and thrilled and throbbed betwixt
The incomplete and the unfixed:

And therein mighty minds were heard
In mighty musings, inly stirred,
And struggling outward for a word:

Until these surges, having run
This way and that, gave out as one
An Aphroditè of sweet tune,

A Harmony that, finding vent,
Upward in grand ascension went,
Winged to a heavenly argument,

Up, upward like a saint who strips
The shroud back from his eyes and lips,
And rises in apocalypse:

A Harmony sublime and plain,
Which cleft (as flying swan, the rain,—
Throwing the drops off with a strain

Of her white wing) those undertones
Of perplext chords, and soared at once
And struck out from the starry thrones

Their several silver octaves as
It passed to God. The music was
Of divine stature; strong to pass:

And those who heard it, understood
Something of life in spirit and blood,
Something of nature's fair and good:

And while it sounded, those great souls
Did thrill as racers at the goals
And burn in all their aureoles;

But she the lady, as vapor-bound,
Stood calmly in the joy of sound,
Like Nature with the showers around:

And when it ceased, the blood which fell
Again, alone grew audible,
Tolling the silence as a bell.

The sovran angel lifted high
His hand, and spake out sovranly:
'Tried poets, hearken and reply!

'Give me true answers. If we grant
That not to suffer, is to want
The conscience of the jubilant,—

'If ignorance of anguish is
But ignorance, and mortals miss
Far prospects, by a level bliss,—

'If, as two colors must be viewed
In a visible image, mortals should
Need good and evil, to see good,—

'If to speak nobly, comprehends
To feel profoundly,—if the ends
Of power and suffering, Nature blends,—

'If poets on the tripod must
Writhe like the Pythian to make just
Their oracles and merit trust,—

'If every vatic word that sweeps
To change the world must pale their lips
And leave their own souls in eclipse,—

'If to search deep the universe
Must pierce the searcher with the curse,
Because that bolt (in man's reverse)

'Was shot to the heart o' the wood and lies
Wedged deepest in the best,—if eyes
That look for visions and surprise

'From influent angels, must shut down
Their eyelids first to sun and moon,
The head asleep upon a stone,—

'If One who did redeem you back,
By His own loss, from final wrack,
Did consecrate by touch and track

'Those temporal sorrows till the taste
Of brackish waters of the waste
Is salt with tears He dropped too fast, —

'If all the crowns of earth must wound
With prickings of the thorns He found, —
If saddest sighs swell sweetest sound, —

'What say ye unto this? — refuse
This baptism in salt water? — choose
Calm breasts, mute lips, and labor loose?

'Or, O ye gifted givers! ye
Who give your liberal hearts to me
To make the world this harmony,

'Are ye resigned that they be spent
To such world's help?'
The Spirits bent
Their awful brows and said 'Content.'

Content! it sounded like *Amen*
Said by a choir of mourning men;
An affirmation full of pain

And patience, — ay, of glorying
And adoration, as a king
Might seal an oath for governing.

Then said the angel — and his face
Lightened abroad until the place
Grew larger for a moment's space, —

The long aisles flashing out in light,
And nave and transept, columns white
And arches crossed, being clear to sight

As if the roof were off and all
Stood in the noon-sun, — 'Lo, I call
To other hearts as liberal.

'This pedal strikes out in the air:
My instrument has room to bear
Still fuller strains and perfecter.

'Herein is room, and shall be room
While Time lasts, for new hearts to come
Consummating while they consume.

'What living man will bring a gift
Of his own heart and help to lift
The tune? — The race is to the swift.'

So asked the angel. Straight the while,
A company came up the aisle
With measured step and sorted smile;

Cleaving the incense-clouds that rise,
With winking unaccustomed eyes
And love-locks smelling sweet of spice.

One bore his head above the rest
As if the world were dispossessed,
And one did pillow chin on breast,

Right languid, an as he should faint,
One shook his curls across his paint
And moralized on worldly taint;

One, slanting up his face, did wink
The salt rheum to the eyelid's brink,
To think — O gods! or — not to think.

Some trod out stealthily and slow,
As if the sun would fall in snow
If they walked to instead of fro;

And some, with conscious ambling free,
Did shake their bells right daintily
On hand and foot, for harmony;

And some, composing sudden sighs
In attitudes of point-device,
Rehearsed impromptu agonies.

And when this company drew near
The spirits crowned, it might appear
Submitted to a ghastly fear;

As a sane eye in master-passion
Constrains a maniac to the fashion
Of hideous maniac imitation

In the least geste — the dropping low
O' the lid, the wrinkling of the brow,
Exaggerate with mock and mow, —

So mastered was that company
By the crowned vision utterly,
Swayed to a maniac mockery.

One dulled his eyeballs, as they ached
With Homer's forehead, though he lacked
An inch of any; and one racked

His lower lip with restless tooth,
As Pindar's rushing words forsooth
Were pent behind it; one his smooth

Pink cheeks did rumple passionate
Like Æschylus, and tried to prate
On trolling tongue of fate and fate;

One set her eyes like Sappho's — or
Any light woman's; one forbore
Like Dante, or any man as poor

In mirth, to let a smile undo
His hard-shut lips; and one that drew
Sour humors from his mother, blew

His sunken cheeks out to the size
Of most unnatural jollities,
Because Anacreon looked jest-wise;

So with the rest: it was a sight
A great world-laughter would requite,
Or great world-wrath, with equal right.

Out came a speaker from that crowd
To speak for all, in sleek and proud
Exordial periods, while he bowed

His knee before the angel — 'Thus,
O angel who hast called for us,
We bring thee service emulous.

'Fit service from sufficient soul,
Hand-service to receive world's dole.
Lip-service in world's ear to roll

Adjusted concords — soft enow
To hear the wine-cups passing, through,
And not too grave to spoil the show:

'Thou, certes, when thou askest more,
O sapient angel, leanest o'er
The window-sill of metaphor.

'To give our hearts up ? fie ! that rage
Barbaric antedates the age;
It is not done on any stage.

'Because your scald or gleeman went
With seven or nine-stringed instrument
Upon his back, — must ours be bent ?

'We are not pilgrims, by your leave;
No, nor yet martyrs; if we grieve,
It is to rhyme to — summer eve:

'And if we labor, it shall be
As suiteth best with our degree,
In after-dinner reverie.'

More yet that speaker would have said,
Poising between his smiles fair-fed
Each separate phrase till finishèd;

But all the foreheads of those born
And dead true poets flashed with scorn
Betwixt the bay leaves round them worn,

Ay, jetted such brave fire that they,
The new-come, shrank and paled away
Like leaden ashes when the day

Strikes on the hearth. A spirit-blast,
A presence known by power, at last
Took them up mutely: they had passed.

And he our pilgrim-poet saw
Only their places, in deep awe,
What time the angel's smile did draw

His gazing upward. Smiling on,
The angel in the angel shone,
Revealing glory in benison;

Till, ripened in the light which shut
The poet in, his spirit mute
Dropped sudden as a perfect fruit:

He fell before the angel's feet,
Saying, 'If what is true is sweet,
In something I may compass it:

'For, where my worthiness is poor,
My will stands richly at the door
To pay shortcomings evermore.

'Accept me therefore: not for price
And not for pride my sacrifice
Is tendered, for my soul is nice

'And will beat down those dusty seeds
Of bearded corn if she succeeds
In soaring while the covey feeds.

'I soar, I am drawn up like the lark
To its white cloud: so high my mark,
Albeit my wing is small and dark.

'I ask no wages, seek no fame:
Sew me, for shroud round face and name,
God's banner of the oriflamme.

'I only would have leave to loose
(In tears and blood if so He choose)
Mine inward music out to use;

'I only would be spent — in pain
And loss, perchance, but not in vain —
Upon the sweetness of that strain;

'Only project beyond the bound
Of mine own life, so lost and found,
My voice, and live on in its sound;

'Only embrace and be embraced
By fiery ends, whereby to waste,
And light God's future with my past.'

The angel's smile grew more divine,
The mortal speaking; ay, its shine
Swelled fuller, like a choir-note fine,

Till the broad glory round his brow
Did vibrate with the light below;
But what he said I do not know.

Nor know I if the man who prayed,
Rose up accepted, unforbade,
From the church-floor where he was laid, —

Nor if a listening life did run
Through the king-poets, one by one
Rejoicing in a worthy son:

My soul, which might have seen, grew blind
By what it looked on: I can find
No certain count of things behind.

I saw alone, dim, white and grand
As in a dream, the angel's hand
Stretched forth in gesture of command

Straight through the haze. And so, as erst,
A strain more noble than the first
Mused in the organ, and outburst:

With giant march from floor to roof
Rose the full notes, now parted off
In pauses massively aloof

Like measured thunders, now re-joined
In concords of mysterious kind
Which fused together sense and mind,

Now flashing sharp on sharp along
Exultant in a mounting throng,
Now dying off to a low song

Fed upon minors, wavelike sounds
Re-eddying into silver rounds,
Enlarging liberty with bounds:

And every rhythm that seemed to close
Survived in confluent underflows
Symphonious with the next that rose.

Thus the whole strain being multiplied
And greatened, with its glorified
Wings shot abroad from side to side,

Waved backward (as a wind might wave
A Brocken mist and with as brave
Wild roaring) arch and architrave,

Aisle, transept, column, marble wall, —
Then swelling outward, prodigal
Of aspiration beyond thrall,

Soared, and drew up with it the whole
Of this said vision, as a soul
Is raised by a thought. And as a scroll

Of bright devices is unrolled
Still upward with a gradual gold,
So rose the vision manifold,

Angel and organ, and the round
Of spirits, solemnized and crowned;
While the freed clouds of incense wound

Ascending, following in their track,
And glimmering faintly like the rack
O' the moon in her own light cast back.

And as that solemn dream withdrew,
The lady's kiss did fall anew
Cold on the poet's brow as dew.

And that same kiss which bound him first
Beyond the senses, now reversed
Its own law and most subtly pierced

His spirit with the sense of things
Sensual and present. Vanishings
Of glory with Æolian wings

Struck him and passed: the lady's face
Did melt back in the chrysopras
Of the orient morning sky that was

Yet clear of lark and there and so
She melted as a star might do,
Still smiling as she melted slow:

Smiling so slow, he seemèd to see
Her smile the last thing, gloriously
Beyond her, far as memory.

Then he looked round: he was alone.
He lay before the breaking sun,
As Jacob at the Bethel stone.

And thought's entangled skein being wound,
He knew the moorland of his swound,
And the pale pools that smeared the ground;

The far wood-pines like offing ships;
The fourth pool's yew anear him drips,
World's cruelty attaints his lips,

And still he tastes it, bitter still;
Through all that glorious possible
He had the sight of present ill.

Yet rising calmly up and slowly
With such a cheer as scorneth folly,
A mild delightsome melancholy,

He journeyed homeward through the wood
And prayed along the solitude
Betwixt the pines, 'O God, my God!'

The golden morning's open flowings
Did sway the trees to murmurous bowings,
In metric chant of blessed poems.

And passing homeward through the wood,
He prayed along the solitude,
'Thou, Poet-God, art great and good!

'And though we must have, and have had
Right reason to be earthly sad,
Thou, Poet-God, art great and glad!'

CONCLUSION

Life treads on life, and heart on heart;
We press too close in church and mart
To keep a dream or grave apart:

And I was 'ware of walking down
That same green forest where had gone
The poet-pilgrim. One by one

I traced his footsteps. From the east
A red and tender radiance pressed
Through the near trees, until I guessed

The sun behind shone full and round;
While up the leafiness profound
A wind scarce old enough for sound

Stood ready to blow on me when
I turned that way, and now and then
The birds sang and brake off again

To shake their pretty feathers dry
Of the dew sliding droppingly
From the leaf-edges and apply

Back to their song: 'twixt dew and bird
So sweet a silence ministered,
God seemed to use it for a word,

Yet morning souls did leap and run
In all things, as the least had won
A joyous insight of the sun,

And no one looking round the wood
Could help confessing as he stood,
This Poet-God is glad and good.

But hark! a distant sound that grows,
A heaving, sinking of the boughs,
A rustling murmur, not of those,

A breezy noise which is not breeze!
And white-clad children by degrees
Steal out in troops among the trees,

Fair little children morning-bright,
With faces grave yet soft to sight,
Expressive of restrained delight.

Some plucked the palm-boughs within reach,
And others leapt up high to catch
The upper boughs and shake from each

A rain of dew till, wetted so,
The child who held the branch let go
And it swang backward with a flow

Of faster drippings. Then I knew
The children laughed; but the laugh flew
From its own chirrup as might do

A frightened song-bird; and a child
Who seemed the chief said very mild,
'Hush! keep this morning undefiled.'

His eyes rebuked them from calm spheres;
His soul upon his brow appears
In waiting for more holy years.

I called the child to me, and said,
'What are your palms for?' 'To be spread,'
He answered, 'on a poet dead.

'The poet died last month, and now
The world which had been somewhat slow
In honoring his living brow,

'Commands the palms; they must be strewn
On his new marble very soon,
In a procession of the town.'

I sighed and said, 'Did he foresee
Any such honor?' 'Verily
I cannot tell you,' answered he.

'But this I know, I fain would lay
My own head down, another day,
As *he* did, — with the fame away.

'A lily, a friend's hand had plucked,
Lay by his death-bed, which he looked
As deep down as a bee had sucked,

'Then, turning to the lattice, gazed
O'er hill and river and upraised
His eyes illumined and amazed

'With the world's beauty, up to God,
Re-offering on their iris broad
The images of things bestowed

'By the chief Poet. "God!" he cried,
"Be praised for anguish which has tried,
For beauty which has satisfied:

'"For this world's presence half within
And half without me — thought and scene —
This sense of Being and Having Been.

'"I thank Thee that my soul hath room
For Thy grand world: both guests may come —
Beauty, to soul — Body, to tomb.

'"I am content to be so weak:
Put strength into the words I speak,
And I am strong in what I seek.

'"I am content to be so bare
Before the archers, everywhere
My wounds being stroked by heavenly air.

'"I laid my soul before Thy feet
That images of fair and sweet
Should walk to other men on it.

'"I am content to feel the step,
Of each pure image: let those keep
To mandragore who care to sleep.

'"I am content to touch the brink
Of the other goblet and I think
My bitter drink a wholesome drink.

'"Because my portion was assigned
Wholesome and bitter, Thou art kind,
And I am blessèd to my mind.

'"Gifted for giving, I receive
The maythorn and its scent outgive:
I grieve not that I once did grieve.

'"In my large joy of sight and touch
Beyond what others count for such,
I am content to suffer much.

'"*I know* — is all the mourner saith,
Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And Life is perfected by Death."'

The child spake nobly: strange to hear,
His infantine soft accents clear
Charged with high meanings, did appear;

And fair to see, his form and face
Winged out with whiteness and pure grace
From the green darkness of the place.

Behind his head a palm-tree grew;
An orient beam which pierced it through
Transversely on his forehead drew

The figure of a palm-branch brown
Traced on its brightness up and down
In fine fair lines, — a shadow-crown:

Guido might paint his angels so —
A little angel, taught to go
With holy words to saints below —

Such innocence of action yet
Significance of object met
In his whole bearing strong and sweet.

And all the children, the whole band,
Did round in rosy reverence stand,
Each with a palm-bough in his hand.

'And so he died,' I whispered. 'Nay,
Not *so*,' the childish voice did say,
'That poet turned him first to pray

'In silence, and God heard the rest
'Twixt the sun's footsteps down the west.
Then he called one who loved him best,

'Yea, he called softly through the room
(His voice was weak yet tender)—"Come,"
He said, "come nearer! Let the bloom

'"Of Life grow over, undenied,
This bridge of Death, which is not wide—
I shall be soon at the other side.

'"Come, kiss me!" So the one in truth
Who loved him best,—in love, not ruth,
Bowed down and kissed him mouth to mouth:

'And in that kiss of love was won
Life's manumission. All was done:
The mouth that kissed last, kissed *alone*.

'But in the former, confluent kiss,
The same was sealed, I think, by His,
To words of truth and uprightness.'

The child's voice trembled, his lips shook
Like a rose leaning o'er a brook,
Which vibrates though it is not struck.

'And who,' I asked, a little moved
Yet curious-eyed, 'was this that loved
And kissed him last, as it behooved?'

'*I*,' softly said the child; and then
'*I*,' said he louder, once again:
'His son, my rank is among men:

'And now that men exalt his name
I come to gather palms with them,
That holy love may hallow fame.

'He did not die alone, nor should
His memory live so, 'mid these rude
World-praisers—a worse solitude.

'Me, a voice calleth to that tomb
Where these are strewing branch and bloom,
Saying, "Come nearer:" and I come.

'Glory to God!' resumèd he,
And his eyes smiled for victory
O'er their own tears which I could see

Fallen on the palm, down cheek and chin:
'That poet now has entered in
The place of rest which is not sin.

'And while he rests, his songs in troops
Walk up and down our earthly slopes,
Companioned by diviner hopes.'

'But *thou*,' I murmured to engage
The child's speech farther—'hast an age
Too tender for this orphanage.'

'Glory to God—to God!' he saith:
'KNOWLEDGE BY SUFFERING ENTERETH,
AND LIFE IS PERFECTED BY DEATH.'

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

Despite the irritating iteration of the refrain *Toll slowly*—which most people omit in reading—the 'Rhyme of the Duchess May' has generally been accounted much the best of Mrs. Browning's longer ballads. Yet the author herself did not like it. On August 22, 1844, she wrote as follows to Mr. Thomas Westwood,—a frequent and valued correspondent; himself a poet of some note, author of *Beads from a Rosary* and *The Burden of the Bell*. 'It is curious that Duchess May is not a favorite of mine, and that I have sighed one or two secret wishes toward its extirpation; but other writers beside yourself have signalled it out for praise, in private letters to me.' We gather from a similarly deprecatory allusion in a letter to her lifelong friend, Mrs. Martin, that the nonconformist conscience of the poet pricked her a little on account of the signal glorification of suicide implied in the dénouement of the Rhyme.

I

To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers from the sun,
Toll slowly.
And the oldest ringer said, 'Ours is music for the dead
When the rebecks are all done.'

II

Six abeles i' the churchyard grow on the north side in a row,
Toll slowly

And the shadows of their tops rock across the little slopes
Of the grassy graves below.

III

On the south side and the west a small river runs in haste,
Toll slowly.
And, between the river flowing and the fair green trees a-growing,
Do the dead lie at their rest.

IV

On the east I sate that day, up against a willow gray:
Toll slowly.
Through the rain of willow-branches I could see the low hill-ranges
And the river on its way.

V

There I sate beneath the tree, and the bell tolled solemnly,
Toll slowly.
While the trees' and river's voices flowed between the solemn noises, —
Yet death seemed more loud to me.

VI

There I read this ancient rhyme while the bell did all the time
Toll slowly.
And the solemn knell fell in with the tale of life and sin,
Like a rhythmic fate sublime.

THE RHYME

I

Broad the forests stood (I read) on the hills of Linteged,
Toll slowly.
And three hundred years had stood mute adown each hoary wood,
Like a full heart having prayed.

II

And the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,
Toll slowly.
And but little thought was theirs of the silent antique years,
In the building of their nest.

III

Down the sun dropped large and red on the towers of Linteged, —
Toll slowly.
Lance and spear upon the height, bristling strange in fiery light,
While the castle stood in shade.

IV

There the castle stood up black with the red sun at its back —
Toll slowly —
Like a sullen smouldering pyre with a top that flickers fire
When the wind is on its track.

V

And five hundred archers tall did besiege the castle wall —
Toll slowly.
And the castle, seethed in blood, fourteen days and nights had stood
And to-night was near its fall.

VI

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months since, a bride did come —
Toll slowly.
One who proudly trod the floors and softly whispered in the doors,
'May good angels bless our home.'

VII

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front of constancies:
Toll slowly.
Oh, a bride of cordial mouth where the untired smile of youth
Did light outward its own sighs!

VIII

'T was a Duke's fair orphan-girl, and her uncle's ward — the Earl —
Toll slowly —
Who betrothed her twelve years old, for the sake of dowry gold,
To his son Lord Leigh the churl.

IX

But what time she had made good all her years of womanhood —
Toll slowly.
Unto both these lords of Leigh spake she out right sovranly,
'My will runneth as my blood.

X

'And while this same blood makes red this
same right hand's veins,' she said —
Toll slowly —
''T is my will, as lady free, not to wed a
lord of Leigh,
But Sir Guy of Linteged.'

XI

The old Earl he smilèd smooth, then he
sighed for wilful youth —
Toll slowly.
'Good my niece, that hand withal looketh
somewhat soft and small
For so large a will, in sooth.'

XII

She too smiled by that same sign, but her
smile was cold and fine —
Toll slowly.
'Little hand clasps muckle gold, or it were
not worth the hold
Of thy son, good uncle mine!'

XIII

Then the young lord jerked his breath, and
sware thickly in his teeth —
Toll slowly —
'He would wed his own betrothed, an she
loved him an she loathed,
Let the life come or the death.'

XIV

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her father's
child might rise —
Toll slowly.
'Thy hound's blood, my lord of Leigh,
stains thy knightly heel,' quoth she,
'And he moans not where he lies:

XV

'But a woman's will dies hard, in the hall
or on the sward' —
Toll slowly.
'By that grave, my lords, which made me
orphaned girl and dowered lady,
I deny you wife and ward!'

XVI

Unto each she bowed her head and swept
past with lofty tread.
Toll slowly.
Ere the midnight-bell had ceased, in the
chapel had the priest,
Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

XVII

Fast and fain the bridal train along the
night-storm rode amain —
Toll slowly.
Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck
their hoofs out on the turf,
In the pauses of the rain.

XVIII

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along the
storm pursued amain —
Toll slowly.
Steed on steed-track, dashing off, — thickening,
doubling, hoof on hoof,
In the pauses of the rain.

XIX

And the bridegroom led the flight on his
red-roan steed of might —
Toll slowly.
And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if
she feared no harm,
Smiling out into the night.

XX

'Dost thou fear?' he said at last. 'Nay,'
she answered him in haste, —
Toll slowly.
'Not such death as we could find — only
life with one behind.
Ride on fast as fear, ride fast!'

XXI

Up the mountain wheeled the steed — girth
to ground, and fetlocks spread —
Toll slowly.
Headlong bounds, and rocking flanks, —
down he staggered, down the banks,
To the towers of Linteged.

XXII

High and low the serfs looked out, red the
flambeaus tossed about —
Toll slowly.
In the courtyard rose the cry, 'Live the
Duchess and Sir Guy!'
But she never heard them shout.

XXIII

On the steed she dropped her cheek, kissed
his mane and kissed his neck —
Toll slowly.
'I had happier died by thee than lived on,
a Lady Leigh,'
Were the first words she did speak.

XXIV

But a three months' joyaunce lay 'twixt that moment and to-day —
Toll slowly.
When five hundred archers tall stand beside the castle wall
To recapture Duchess May.

XXV

And the castle standeth black with the red sun at its back —
Toll slowly.
And a fortnight's siege is done, and, except the duchess, none
Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

XXVI

Then the captain, young Lord Leigh, with his eyes so gray of blee —
Toll slowly.
And thin lips that scarcely sheathe the cold white gnashing of his teeth,
Gnashed in smiling, absently, —

XXVII

Cried aloud, 'So goes the day, bridegroom fair of Duchess May!'
Toll slowly.
'Look thy last upon that sun! if thou seest to-morrow's one
'T will be through a foot of clay.

XXVIII

'Ha, fair bride! dost hear no sound save that moaning of the hound?'
Toll slowly.
'Thou and I have parted troth, yet I keep my vengeance-oath,
And the other may come round.

XXIX

'Ha! thy will is brave to dare, and thy new love past compare' —
Toll slowly.
'Yet thine old love's falchion brave is as strong a thing to have,
As the will of lady fair.

XXX

'Peck on blindly, netted dove! If a wife's name thee behove' —
Toll slowly.
'Thou shalt wear the same to-morrow, ere the grave has hid the sorrow
Of thy last ill-mated love.

XXXI

'O'er his fixed and silent mouth, thou and I will call back troth:'
Toll slowly.
'He shall altar be and priest, — and he will not cry at least
"I forbid you, I am loth!"

XXXII

'I will wring thy fingers pale in the gauntlet of my mail:'
Toll slowly.
'"Little hand and muckle gold" close shall lie within my hold,
As the sword did, to prevail.'

XXXIII

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west —
Toll slowly.
Oh, and laughed the Duchess May, and her soul did put away
All his boasting, for a jest.

XXXIV

In her chamber did she sit, laughing low to think of it, —
Toll slowly.
'Tower is strong and will is free: thou canst boast, my lord of Leigh,
But thou boastest little wit.'

XXXV

In her tire-glass gazèd she, and she blushed right womanly —
Toll slowly.
She blushed half from her disdain, half her beauty was so plain,
—'Oath for oath, my lord of Leigh!'

XXXVI

Straight she called her maidens in — 'Since ye gave me blame herein' —
Toll slowly —
'That a bridal such as mine should lack gauds to make it fine,
Come and shrive me from that sin.

XXXVII

'It is three months gone to-day since I gave mine hand away:'
Toll slowly.
'Bring the gold and bring the gem, we will keep bride-state in them,
While we keep the foe at bay.

XXXVIII

'On your arms I loose mine hair; comb it smooth and crown it fair'—
Toll slowly.
'I would look in purple pall from this lattice down the wall,
And throw scorn to one that 's there!'

XXXIX

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west—
Toll slowly.
On the tower the castle's lord leant in silence on his sword,
With an anguish in his breast.

XL

With a spirit-laden weight did he lean down passionate:
Toll slowly.
They have almost sapped the wall,—they will enter therewithal
With no knocking at the gate.

XLI

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered, snapped upon the stone—
Toll slowly.
'Sword,' he thought, with inward laugh, 'ill thou servest for a staff
When thy nobler use is done!

XLII

'Sword, thy nobler use is done! tower is lost, and shame begun!'—
Toll slowly.
'If we met them in the breach, hilt to hilt or speech to speech,
We should die there, each for one.

XLIII

'If we met them at the wall, we should singly, vainly fall'—
Toll slowly.
'But if *I* die here alone,—then I die who am but one,
And die nobly for them all.

XLIV

'Five true friends lie for my sake in the moat and in the brake'—
Toll slowly.
'Thirteen warriors lie at rest with a black wound in the breast,
And not one of these will wake.

XLV

'So, no more of this shall be! heart-blood weighs too heavily'—
Toll slowly.
'And I could not sleep in grave, with the faithful and the brave
Heaped around and over me.

XLVI

'Since young Clare a mother hath, and young Ralph a plighted faith'—
Toll slowly.
'Since my pale young sister's cheeks blush like rose when Ronald speaks,
Albeit never a word she saith—

XLVII

'These shall never die for me: life-blood falls too heavily:'
Toll slowly.
'And if *I* die here apart, o'er my dead and silent heart
They shall pass out safe and free.

XLVIII

'When the foe hath heard it said—"Death holds Guy of Linteged"'—
Toll slowly.
'That new corse new peace shall bring, and a blessèd, blessèd thing
Shall the stone be at its head.

XLIX

'Then my friends shall pass out free, and shall bear my memory'—
Toll slowly.
'Then my foes shall sleek their pride, soothing fair my widowed bride
Whose sole sin was love of me:

L

'With their words all smooth and sweet, they will front her and entreat'—
Toll slowly.
'And their purple pall will spread underneath her fainting head
While her tears drop over it.

LI

'She will weep her woman's tears, she will pray her woman's prayers'—
Toll slowly.
'But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will spring again
By the suntime of her years.

LII

'Ah, sweet May! ah, sweetest grief! — once I vowed thee my belief' —
Toll slowly —
'That thy name expressed thy sweetness, — May of poets, in completeness!
Now my May-day seemeth brief.'

LIII

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his eyes grown strange and dim —
Toll slowly.
Till his true men, in the place, wished they stood there face to face
With the foe instead of him.

LIV

'One last oath, my friends that wear faithful hearts to do and dare!'
Toll slowly.
'Tower must fall and bride be lost — swear me service worth the cost!'
Bold they stood around to swear.

LV

'Each man clasp my hand and swear by the deed we failed in there' —
Toll slowly.
'Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye strike one blow to-night!'
Pale they stood around to swear.

LVI

'One last boon, young Ralph and Clare! faithful hearts to do and dare!'
Toll slowly.
'Bring that steed up from his stall, which she kissed before you all:
Guide him up the turret-stair.

LVII

'Ye shall harness him aright, and lead upward to this height:'
Toll slowly.
'Once in love and twice in war hath he borne me strong and far:
He shall bear me far to-night.'

LVIII

Then his men looked to and fro, when they heard him speaking so —
Toll slowly.
'’Las! the noble heart,' they thought, 'he in sooth is grief-distraught:
Would we stood here with the foe!'

LIX

But a fire flashed from his eye, 'twixt their thought and their reply —
Toll slowly.
'Have ye so much time to waste? We who ride here, must ride fast
As we wish our foes to fly.'

LX

They have fetched the steed with care, in the harness he did wear —
Toll slowly.
Past the court and through the doors, across the rushes of the floors,
But they goad him up the stair.

LXI

Then from out her bower chambère did the Duchess May repair:
Toll slowly.
'Tell me now what is your need,' said the lady, 'of this steed,
That ye goad him up the stair?'

LXII

Calm she stood; unbodkined through, fell her dark hair to her shoe:
Toll slowly.
And the smile upon her face, ere she left the tiring-glass,
Had not time enough to go.

LXIII

'Get thee back, sweet Duchess May! hope is gone like yesterday' —
Toll slowly.
'One half-hour completes the breach; and thy lord grows wild of speech —
Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray!

LXIV

'In the east tower, high'st of all, loud he cries for steed from stall:'
Toll slowly.
'"He would ride as far," quoth he, "as for love and victory,
Though he rides the castle-wall."

LXV

'And we fetch the steed from stall, up where never a hoof did fall' —
Toll slowly.
'Wifely prayer meets deathly need: may the sweet Heavens hear thee plead
If he rides the castle-wall!'

LXVI

Low she dropped her head, and lower, till her hair coiled on the floor —
Toll slowly.
And tear after tear you heard fall distinct as any word
Which you might be listening for.

LXVII

'Get thee in, thou soft ladye! here is never a place for thee!'
Toll slowly.
'Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown, that thy beauty in its moan
May find grace with Leigh of Leigh.'

LXVIII

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face:
Toll slowly.
Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though quivering, seems to look
Right against the thunder-place.

LXIX

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own tears i' the stone beside —
Toll slowly.
'Go to, faithful friends, go to! judge no more what ladies do,
No, nor how their lords may ride!'

LXX

Then the good steed's rein she took, and his neck did kiss and stroke:
Toll slowly.
Soft he neighed to answer her, and then followed up the stair
For the love of her sweet look:

LXXI

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the narrow stair around —
Toll slowly.
Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by step beside her treading
Did he follow, meek as hound.

LXXII

On the east tower, high'st of all, — there, where never a hoof did fall —
Toll slowly.
Out they swept, a vision steady, noble steed and lovely lady,
Calm as if in bower or stall.

LXXIII

Down she knelt at her lord's knee, and she looked up silently —
Toll slowly.
And he kissed her twice and thrice, for that look within her eyes
Which he could not bear to see.

LXXIV

Quoth he, 'Get thee from this strife, and the sweet saints bless thy life!'
Toll slowly.
'In this hour I stand in need of my noble red-roan steed,
But no more of my noble wife.'

LXXV

Quoth she, 'Meekly have I done all thy biddings under sun:'
Toll slowly.
'But by all my womanhood, which is proved so, true and good,
I will never do this one.

LXXVI

'Now by womanhood's degree and by wifehood's verity' —
Toll slowly.
'In this hour if thou hast need of thy noble red-roan steed,
Thou hast also need of *me*.

LXXVII

'By this golden ring ye see on this lifted hand pardiè' —
Toll slowly.
'If, this hour, on castle-wall can be room for steed from stall,
Shall be also room for *me*.

LXXVIII

'So the sweet saints with me be,' (did she utter solemnly) —
Toll slowly.
'If a man, this eventide, on this castle-wall will ride,
He shall ride the same with *me*.'

LXXIX

Oh, he sprang up in the selle and he laughed out bitter-well —
Toll slowly.
'Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as we used on other eves,
To hear chime a vesper-bell?'

LXXX

She clung closer to his knee — 'Ay, beneath the cypress-tree!'
Toll slowly.
'Mock me not, for otherwise than along the greenwood fair
Have I ridden fast with thee.

LXXXI

'Fast I rode with new-made vows from my angry kinsman's house:'
Toll slowly.
'What, and would you men should reck that I dared more for love's sake
As a bride than as a spouse?

LXXXII

'What, and would you it should fall, as a proverb, before all' —
Toll slowly.
'That a bride may keep your side while through castle-gate you ride,
Yet eschew the castle-wall?'

LXXXIII

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin and roars up against her suing —
Toll slowly.
With the inarticulate din and the dreadful falling in —
Shrieks of doing and undoing!

LXXXIV

Twice he wrung her hands in twain, but the small hands closed again.
Toll slowly.
Back he reined the steed — back, back! but she trailed along his track
With a frantic clasp and strain.

LXXXV

Evermore the foemen pour through the crash of window and door —
Toll slowly.
And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and the shrieks of 'kill!' and 'flee!'
Strike up clear amid the roar.

LXXXVI

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain, but they closed and clung again —
Toll slowly.
While she clung, as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon the rood,
In a spasm of deathly pain.

LXXXVII

She clung wild and she clung mute with her shuddering lips half-shut:
Toll slowly.
Her head fallen as half in swound, hair and knee swept on the ground,
She clung wild to stirrup and foot.

LXXXVIII

Back he reined his steed back-thrown on the slippery coping-stone:
Toll slowly.
Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battlement behind
Whence a hundred feet went down:

LXXXIX

And his heel did press and goad on the quivering flank bestrode —
Toll slowly.
'Friends and brothers, save my wife! Pardon, sweet, in change for life, —
But I ride alone to God.'

XC

Straight as if the Holy name had upbreathed her like a flame —
Toll slowly.
She upsprang, she rose upright, in his selle she sate in sight,
By her love she overcame.

XCI

And her head was on his breast where she smiled as one at rest —
Toll slowly.
'Ring,' she cried, 'O vesper-bell in the beechwood's old chapelle —
But the passing-bell rings best!'

XCII

They have caught out at the rein which Sir Guy threw loose — in vain —
Toll slowly.
For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoofs poised in air,
On the last verge rears amain.

XCIII

Now he hangs, he rocks between, and his nostrils curdle in —
Toll slowly.
Now he shivers head and hoof and the flakes of foam fall off,
And his face grows fierce and thin:

XCIV

And a look of human woe from his staring
eyes did go:
Toll slowly.
And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold
agony
Of the headlong death below, —

XCV

And, 'Ring, ring, thou passing-bell,' still
she cried, 'i' the old chapelle!'
Toll slowly.
Then, back-toppling, crashing back — a
dead weight flung out to wrack,
Horse and riders overfell.

I

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west —
Toll slowly.
And I read this ancient Rhyme, in the
churchyard, while the chime
Slowly tolled for one at rest.

II

The abeles moved in the sun, and the river
smooth did run —
Toll slowly.
And the ancient Rhyme rang strange, with
its passion and its change,
Here, where all done lay undone.

III

And beneath a willow tree I a little grave
did see —
Toll slowly —
Where was graved — HERE, UNDEFILED,
LIETH MAUD, A THREE-YEAR CHILD,
EIGHTEEN HUNDRED FORTY-THREE.

IV

Then, O spirits, did I say, ye who rode so
fast that day —
Toll slowly.
Did star-wheels and angel wings with their
holy winnowings
Keep beside you all the way?

V

Though in passion ye would dash, with a
blind and heavy crash —
Toll slowly —
Up against the thick-bossed shield of God's
judgment in the field, —
Though your heart and brain were
rash, —

VI

Now, your will is all unwilled; now, your
pulses are all stilled:
Toll slowly.
Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso
laid) as Maud the child
Whose small grave was lately filled.

VII

Beating heart and burning brow, ye are
very patient now —
Toll slowly.
And the children might be bold to pluck
the kingcups from your mould
Ere a month had let them grow.

VIII

And you let the goldfinch sing in the alder
near in spring —
Toll slowly.
Let her build her nest and sit all the three
weeks out on it,
Murmuring not at anything.

IX

In your patience ye are strong, cold and
heat ye take not wrong —
Toll slowly.
When the trumpet of the angel blows eternity's evangel,
Time will seem to you not long.

X

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west —
Toll slowly.
And I said in underbreath, — All our life
is mixed with death,
And who knoweth which is best?

XI

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little
birds sang west —
Toll slowly.
And I smiled to think God's greatness
flowed around our incompleteness, —
Round our restlessness, His rest.

THE LADY'S 'YES'

I

'Yes,' I answered you last night;
'No,' this morning, sir, I say:
Colors seen by candle-light
Will not look the same by day.

II

When the viols played their best,
Lamps above and laughs below,
Love me sounded like a jest,
Fit for *yes* or fit for *no.*

III

Call me false or call me free,
Vow, whatever light may shine, —
No man on your face shall see
Any grief for change on mine.

IV

Yet the sin is on us both;
Time to dance is not to woo;
Wooing light makes fickle troth,
Scorn of *me* recoils on *you.*

V

Learn to win a lady's faith
Nobly, as the thing is high,
Bravely, as for life and death,
With a loyal gravity.

VI

Lead her from the festive boards,
Point her to the starry skies;
Guard her, by your truthful words,
Pure from courtship's flatteries.

VII

By your truth she shall be true,
Ever true, as wives of yore;
And her *yes*, once said to you,
Shall be Yes for evermore.

THE POET AND THE BIRD

A FABLE

I

Said a people to a poet — 'Go out from among us straightway!
While we are thinking earthly things, thou singest of divine:
There 's a little fair brown nightingale who, sitting in the gateway,
Makes fitter music to our ear than any song of thine!'

II

The poet went out weeping; the nightingale ceased chanting:
'Now, wherefore, O thou nightingale, is all thy sweetness done?'
— 'I cannot sing my earthly things, the heavenly poet wanting,
Whose highest harmony includes the lowest under sun.'

III

The poet went out weeping, and died abroad, bereft there;
The bird flew to his grave and died amid a thousand wails:
And when I last came by the place, I swear the music left there
Was only of the poet's song, and not the nightingale's.

THE LOST BOWER

The scene of 'The Lost Bower' was the wood above the garden at Hope End, among the Malvern Hills, — the beautiful home of Elizbeth Barrett's girlhood, — and the incident which it relates was an actual experience of her juvenile years.

I

In the pleasant orchard-closes,
'God bless all our gains,' say we,
But 'May God bless all our losses'
Better suits with our degree.
Listen, gentle — ay, and simple! listen, children on the knee!

II

Green the land is where my daily
Steps in jocund childhood played,
Dimpled close with hill and valley,
Dappled very close with shade:
Summer-snow of apple-blossoms running up from glade to glade.

III

There is one hill I see nearer
In my vision of the rest:
And a little wood seems clearer

As it climbeth from the west,
Sideway from the tree-locked valley, to the airy upland crest.

IV

Small the wood is, green with hazels,
And, completing the ascent,
Where the wind blows and sun dazzles,
Thrills in leafy tremblement,
Like a heart that after climbing beateth quickly through content.

V

Not a step the wood advances
O'er the open hill-top's bound;
There, in green arrest, the branches
See their image on the ground:
You may walk beneath them smiling, glad with sight and glad with sound.

VI

For you hearken on your right hand,
How the birds do leap and call
In the greenwood, out of sight and
Out of reach and fear of all;
And the squirrels crack the filberts through their cheerful madrigal.

VII

On your left, the sheep are cropping
The slant grass and daisies pale,
And five apple-trees stand dropping
Separate shadows toward the vale
Over which, in choral silence, the hills look you their 'All hail!'

VIII

Far out, kindled by each other,
Shining hills on hills arise,
Close as brother leans to brother
When they press beneath the eyes
Of some father praying blessings from the gifts of paradise.

IX

While beyond, above them mounted,
And above their woods alsò,
Malvern hills, for mountains counted
Not unduly, loom a-row —
Keepers of Piers Plowman's visions through the sunshine and the snow.

X

Yet, in childhood, little prized I
That fair walk and far survey;
'T was a straight walk unadvised by
The least mischief worth a nay;
Up and down — as dull as grammar on the eve of holiday.

XI

But the wood, all close and clenching
Bough in bough and root in root, —
No more sky (for overbranching)
At your head than at your foot, —
Oh, the wood drew me within it by a glamour past dispute!

XII

Few and broken paths showed through it,
Where the sheep had tried to run, —
Forced with snowy wool to strew it
Round the thickets, when anon
They, with silly thorn-pricked noses, bleated back into the sun.

XIII

But my childish heart beat stronger
Than those thickets dared to grow:
I could pierce them! *I* could longer
Travel on, methought, than so:
Sheep for sheep-paths! braver children climb and creep where they would go.

XIV

And the poets wander, said I,
Over places all as rude:
Bold Rinaldo's lovely lady
Sat to meet him in a wood:
Rosalinda, like a fountain, laughed out pure with solitude.

XV

And if Chaucer had not travelled
Through a forest by a well,
He had never dreamt nor marvelled
At those ladies fair and fell
Who lived smiling without loving in their island-citadel.

XVI

Thus I thought of the old singers
And took courage from their song,
Till my little struggling fingers
Tore asunder gyve and thong
Of the brambles which entrapped me, and the barrier branches strong.

XVII

On a day, such pastime keeping,
With a fawn's heart debonair,
Under-crawling, overleaping
Thorns that prick and boughs that bear,
I stood suddenly astonied — I was gladdened unaware.

XVIII

From the place I stood in, floated
Back the covert dim and close,
And the open ground was coated
Carpet-smooth with grass and moss,
And the blue-bell's purple presence signed it worthily across.

XIX

Here a linden-tree stood, bright'ning
All adown its silver rind;
For as some trees draw the lightning,
So this tree, unto my mind,
Drew to earth the blessèd sunshine from the sky where it was shrined.

XX

Tall the linden-tree, and near it
An old hawthorn also grew;
And wood-ivy like a spirit
Hovered dimly round the two,
Shaping thence that bower of beauty which I sing of thus to you.

XXI

'T was a bower for garden fitter
Than for any woodland wide:
Though a fresh and dewy glitter
Struck it through from side to side,
Shaped and shaven was the freshness, as by garden-cunning plied.

XXII

Oh, a lady might have come there,
Hooded fairly like her hawk,
With a book or lute in summer,
And a hope of sweeter talk, —
Listening less to her own music than for footsteps on the walk!

XXIII

But that bower appeared a marvel
In the wildness of the place;
With such seeming art and travail,
Finely fixed and fitted was
Leaf to leaf, the dark-green ivy, to the summit from the base.

XXIV

And the ivy veined and glossy
Was enwrought with eglantine;
And the wild hop fibred closely,
And the large-leaved columbine,
Arch of door and window-mullion, did right sylvanly entwine.

XXV

Rose-trees either side the door were
Growing lithe and growing tall,
Each one set a summer warder
For the keeping of the hall, —
With a red rose and a white rose, leaning, nodding at the wall.

XXVI

As I entered, mosses hushing
Stole all noises from my foot;
And a green elastic cushion,
Clasped within the linden's root,
Took me in a chair of silence very rare and absolute.

XXVII

All the floor was paved with glory,
Greenly, silently inlaid
(Through quick motions made before me)
With fair counterparts in shade
Of the fair serrated ivy-leaves which slanted overhead.

XXVIII

'Is such pavement in a palace?'
So I questioned in my thought:
The sun, shining through the chalice
Of the red rose hung without,
Threw within a red libation, like an answer to my doubt.

XXIX

At the same time, on the linen
Of my childish lap there fell
Two white may-leaves, downward winning
Through the ceiling's miracle,
From a blossom, like an angel, out of sight yet blessing well.

XXX

Down to floor and up to ceiling
Quick I turned my childish face,
With an innocent appealing

For the secret of the place
To the trees, which surely knew it in partaking of the grace.

XXXI

Where 's no foot of human creature
How could reach a human hand?
And if this be work of Nature,
Why has Nature turned so bland,
Breaking off from other wild-work? It was hard to understand.

XXXII

Was she weary of rough-doing,
Of the bramble and the thorn?
Did she pause in tender rueing
Here of all her sylvan scorn?
Or in mock of Art's deceiving was the sudden mildness worn?

XXXIII

Or could this same bower (I fancied)
Be the work of Dryad strong,
Who, surviving all that chancèd
In the world's old pagan wrong,
Lay hid, feeding in the woodland on the last true poet's song?

XXXIV

Or was this the house of fairies,
Left, because of the rough ways,
Unassoiled by Ave Marys
Which the passing pilgrim prays,
And beyond St. Catherine's chiming on the blessèd Sabbath days?

XXXV

So, young muser, I sat listening
To my fancy's wildest word:
On a sudden, through the glistening
Leaves around, a little stirred,
Came a sound, a sense of music which was rather felt than heard.

XXXVI

Softly, finely, it inwound me;
From the world it shut me in, —
Like a fountain, falling round me,
Which with silver waters thin
Clips a little water Naiad sitting smilingly within.

XXXVII

Whence the music came, who knoweth?
I know nothing: but indeed
Pan or Faunus never bloweth
So much sweetness from a reed
Which has sucked the milk of waters at the oldest river-head.

XXXVIII

Never lark the sun can waken
With such sweetness! when the lark,
The high planets overtaking
In the half-evanished Dark,
Casts his singing to their singing, like an arrow to the mark.

XXXIX

Never nightingale so singeth:
Oh, she leans on thorny tree
And her poet-song she flingeth
Over pain to victory!
Yet she never sings such music, — or she sings it not to me.

XL

Never blackbirds, never thrushes
Nor small finches sing as sweet,
When the sun strikes through the bushes
To their crimson clinging feet,
And their pretty eyes look sideways to the summer heavens complete.

XLI

If it *were* a bird, it seemèd
Most like Chaucer's, which, in sooth.
He of green and azure dreamèd,
While it sat in spirit-ruth
On that bier of a crowned lady, singing nigh her silent mouth.

XLII

If it *were* a bird? — ah, sceptic,
Give me 'yea' or give me 'nay' —
Though my soul were nympholeptic
As I heard that virèlay,
You may stoop your pride to pardon, for my sin is far away!

XLIII

I rose up in exaltation
And an inward trembling heat,
And (it seemed) in geste of passion
Dropped the music to my feet
Like a garment rustling downwards — such a silence followed it!

XLIV

Heart and head beat through the quiet
Full and heavily, though slower:

In the song, I think, and by it,
Mystic Presences of power
Had up-snatched me to the Timeless, then returned me to the Hour.

XLV

In a child-abstraction lifted,
Straightway from the bower I past,
Foot and soul being dimly drifted
Through the greenwood, till, at last,
In the hill-top's open sunshine I all consciously was cast.

XLVI

Face to face with the true mountains
I stood silently and still,
Drawing strength from fancy's dauntings,
From the air about the hill,
And from Nature's open mercies and most debonair goodwill.

XLVII

Oh, the golden-hearted daisies
Witnessed there, before my youth,
To the truth of things, with praises
Of the beauty of the truth;
And I woke to Nature's real, laughing joyfully for both.

XLVIII

And I said within me, laughing,
I have found a bower to-day,
A green lusus, fashioned half in
Chance and half in Nature's play,
And a little bird sings nigh it, I will nevermore missay.

XLIX

Henceforth, *I* will be the fairy
Of this bower not built by one;
I will go there, sad or merry,
With each morning's benison,
And the bird shall be my harper in the dream-hall I have won.

L

So I said. But the next morning,
(— Child, look up into my face —
'Ware, oh sceptic, of your scorning!
This is truth in its pure grace!)
The next morning, all had vanished, or my wandering missed the place.

LI

Bring an oath most sylvan-holy,
And upon it swear me true —
By the wind-bells swinging slowly
Their mute curfews in the dew,
By the advent of the snowdrop, by the rosemary and rue, —

LII

I affirm by all or any,
Let the cause be charm or chance,
That my wandering searches many
Missed the bower of my romance —
That I nevermore upon it turned my mortal countenance.

LIII

I affirm that, since I lost it,
Never bower has seemed so fair;
Never garden-creeper crossed it
With so deft and brave an air,
Never bird sung in the summer, as I saw and heard them there.

LIV

Day by day, with new desire,
Toward my wood I ran in faith,
Under leaf and over brier,
Through the thickets, out of breath;
Like the prince who rescued Beauty from the sleep as long as death.

LV

But his sword of mettle clashèd,
And his arm smote strong, I ween,
And her dreaming spirit flashèd
Through her body's fair white screen,
And the light thereof might guide him up the cedar alleys green:

LVI

But for me, I saw no splendor —
All my sword was my child-heart;
And the wood refused surrender
Of that bower it held apart,
Safe as Œdipus's grave-place 'mid Colonos' olives swart.

LVII

As Aladdin sought the basements
His fair palace rose upon,
And the four-and-twenty casements
Which gave answers to the sun;
So, in 'wilderment of gazing, I looked up and I looked down.

LVIII

Years have vanished since, as wholly
As the little bower did then;
And you call it tender folly
That such thoughts should come again?
Ah, I cannot change this sighing for your smiling, brother men!

LIX

For this loss it did prefigure
Other loss of better good,
When my soul, in spirit-vigor
And in ripened womanhood,
Fell from visions of more beauty than an arbor in a wood.

LX

I have lost — oh, many a pleasure,
Many a hope and many a power —
Studious health and merry leisure,
The first dew on the first flower!
But the first of all my losses was the losing of the bower.

LXI

I have lost the dream of Doing,
And the other dream of Done,
The first spring in the pursuing,
The first pride in the Begun, —
First recoil from incompletion, in the face of what is won —

LXII

Exaltations in the far light
Where some cottage only is;
Mild dejections in the starlight,
Which the sadder-hearted miss;
And the child-cheek blushing scarlet for the very shame of bliss.

LXIII

I have lost the sound child-sleeping
Which the thunder could not break;
Something too of the strong leaping
Of the staglike heart awake,
Which the pale is low for keeping in the road it ought to take.

LXIV

Some respect to social fictions
Has been also lost by me;
And some generous genuflexions,
Which my spirit offered free
To the pleasant old conventions of our false humanity.

LXV

All my losses did I tell you,
Ye perchance would look away; —
Ye would answer me, 'Farewell! you
Make sad company to-day,
And your tears are falling faster than the bitter words you say.'

LXVI

For God placed me like a dial
In the open ground with power,
And my heart had for its trial
All the sun and all the shower:
And I suffered many losses, — and my first was of the bower.

LXVII

Laugh you? If that loss of mine be
Of no heavy-seeming weight —
When the cone falls from the pine-tree,
The young children laugh thereat;
Yet the wind that struck it, riseth, and the tempest shall be great.

LXVIII

One who knew me in my childhood
In the glamour and the game,
Looking on me long and mild, would
Never know me for the same.
Come, unchanging recollections, where those changes overcame!

LXIX

By this couch I weakly lie on,
While I count my memories, —
Through the fingers which, still sighing,
I press closely on mine eyes, —
Clear as once beneath the sunshine, I behold the bower arise.

LXX

Springs the linden-tree as greenly,
Stroked with light adown its rind;
And the ivy-leaves serenely
Each in either intertwined;
And the rose-trees at the doorway, they have neither grown nor pined.

LXXI

From those overblown faint roses
Not a leaf appeareth shed,
And that little bud discloses
Not a thorn's-breadth more of red,
For the winters and the summers which have passed me overhead.

LXXII

And that music overfloweth,
Sudden sweet, the sylvan eaves:
Thrush or nightingale — who knoweth ?
Fay or Faunus — who believes ?
But my heart still trembles in me to the trembling of the leaves.

LXXIII

Is the bower lost, then ? who sayeth
That the bower indeed is lost ?
Hark ! my spirit in it prayeth
Through the sunshine and the frost, —
And the prayer preserves it greenly, to the last and uttermost.

LXXIV

Till another open for me
In God's Eden-land unknown,
With an angel at the doorway,
White with gazing at his Throne;
And a saint's voice in the palm-trees, singing — 'All is lost . . . and *won !*'

A CHILD ASLEEP

First printed in Finden's *Tableaux* for 1840 as 'The Dream.'

I

How he sleepeth, having drunken
Weary childhood's mandragore !
From its pretty eyes have sunken
Pleasures to make room for more;
Sleeping near the withered nosegay which he pulled the day before.

II

Nosegays ! leave them for the waking;
Throw them earthward where they grew;
Dim are such beside the breaking
Amaranths he looks unto:
Folded eyes see brighter colors than the open ever do.

III

Heaven-flowers, rayed by shadows golden
From the palms they sprang beneath,
Now perhaps divinely holden,
Swing against him in a wreath:
We may think so from the quickening of his bloom and of his breath.

IV

Vision unto vision calleth
While the young child dreameth on:
Fair, O dreamer, thee befalleth
With the glory thou hast won !
Darker wast thou in the garden yestermorn by summer sun.

V

We should see the spirits ringing
Round thee, were the clouds away:
'T is the child-heart draws them, singing
In the silent-seeming clay —
Singing ! stars that seem the mutest go in music all the way.

VI

As the moths around a taper,
As the bees around a rose,
As the gnats around a vapor,
So the spirits group and close
Round about a holy childhood as if drinking its repose.

VII

Shapes of brightness overlean thee,
Flash their diadems of youth
On the ringlets which half screen thee,
While thou smilest . . . not in sooth
Thy smile, but the overfair one, dropt from some ethereal mouth.

VIII

Haply it is angels' duty,
During slumber, shade by shade
To fine down this childish beauty
To the thing it must be made
Ere the world shall bring it praises, or the tomb shall see it fade.

IX

Softly, softly ! make no noises !
Now he lieth dead and dumb;
Now he hears the angels' voices
Folding silence in the room:
Now he muses deep the meaning of the Heaven-words as they come.

X

Speak not ! he is consecrated;
Breathe no breath across his eyes:
Lifted up and separated
On the hand of God he lies
In a sweetness beyond touching, held in cloistral sanctities.

XI

Could ye bless him, father — mother,
Bless the dimple in his cheek?
Dare ye look at one another
And the benediction speak?
Would ye not break out in weeping and confess yourselves too weak?

XII

He is harmless, ye are sinful;
Ye are troubled, he at ease;
From his slumber virtue winful
Floweth outward with increase.
Dare not bless him! but be blessèd by his peace, and go in peace.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

'Φεῦ, φεῦ, τί προσδέρκεσθέ μ' ὄμμασιν, τέκνα;'
— *Medea.*

'The Cry of the Children,' first published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, for August, 1843, was called forth by Mr. Horne's report as assistant Commissioner on the employment of children in mines and factories.

I

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
And *that* cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
The young birds are chirping in the nest,
The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
The young flowers are blowing toward the west —
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

II

Do you question the young children in the sorrow
Why their tears are falling so?
The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago;
The old tree is leafless in the forest,
The old year is ending in the frost,
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
The old hope is hardest to be lost:
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland?

III

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy;
'Your old earth,' they say, 'is very dreary,
Our young feet,' they say, 'are very weak;
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary —
Our grave-rest is very far to seek:
Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children,
For the outside earth is cold,
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old.

IV

'True,' say the children, 'it may happen
That we die before our time:
Little Alice died last year, her grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.
We looked into the pit prepared to take her:
Was no room for any work in the close clay!
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
Crying, "Get up, little Alice! it is day."
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries;
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes:
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
The shroud by the kirk-chime.

It is good when it happens,' say the children,
'That we die before our time.'

V

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have:
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do;
Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty,
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!
But they answer, 'Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine!

VI

'For oh,' say the children, 'we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap;
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
Through the coal-dark, underground;
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

VII

'For all day the wheels are droning, turning;
Their wind comes in our faces,
Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places:
Turns the sky in the high window, blank and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling:
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.
And all day the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
"O ye wheels" (breaking out in a mad moaning),
"Stop! be silent for to-day!"'

VIII

Ay, be silent! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth!
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth!
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals:
Let them prove their living souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

IX

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray;
So the blessèd One who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, 'Who is God that He should hear us,
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.
And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door:
Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
Hears our weeping any more?

X

'Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,

"Our Father," looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm.
We know no other words except "Our Father,"
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
And hold both within his right hand which is strong.
"Our Father!" If He heard us, He would surely
(For they call Him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
"Come and rest with me, my child."

XI

'But, no!' say the children, weeping faster,
'He is speechless as a stone:
And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.
Go to!' say the children,—'up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving:
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.'
Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
O my brothers, what ye preach?
For God's possible is taught by his world's loving,
And the children doubt of each.

XII

And well may the children weep before you!
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun.
They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;
They sink in man's despair, without its calm;
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm:
Are worn as if with age, yet unretrievingly
The harvest of its memories cannot reap,—
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.
Let them weep! let them weep!

XIII

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity.
'How long,' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,—
Stifle down with a mailèd heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath.'

CROWNED AND WEDDED

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha were betrothed in October, 1839, and married February 1, 1840. This poem was first printed in the *Athenæum* for February 15, 1840, as 'The Crowned and Wedded Queen.'

I

When last before her people's face her own fair face she bent,
Within the meek projection of that shade she was content
To erase the child-smile from her lips, which seemed as if it might
Be still kept holy from the world to childhood still in sight—
To erase it with a solemn vow, a princely vow—to rule;
A priestly vow—to rule by grace of God the pitiful;

A very godlike vow — to rule in right and righteousness
And with the law and for the land — so God the vower bless!

II

The minster was alight that day, but not with fire, I ween,
And long-drawn glitterings swept adown that mighty aislèd scene;
The priests stood stolèd in their pomp, the sworded chiefs in theirs,
And so, the collared knights, and so, the civil ministers,
And so, the waiting lords and dames, and little pages best
At holding trains, and legates so, from countries east and west;
So, alien princes, native peers, and high-born ladies bright,
Along whose brows the Queen's, now crowned, flashed coronets to light;
And so, the people at the gates with priestly hands on high
Which bring the first anointing to all legal majesty;
And so the DEAD, who lie in rows beneath the minster floor,
There verily an awful state maintaining evermore:
The statesman whose clean palm will kiss no bribe whate'er it be,
The courtier who for no fair queen will rise up to his knee,
The court-dame who for no court-tire will leave her shroud behind,
The laureate who no courtlier rhyme than 'dust to dust' can find,
The kings and queens who having made that vow and worn that crown,
Descended unto lower thrones and darker, deep adown:
Dieu et mon droit — what is 't to them? what meaning can it have? —
The King of kings, the right of death — God's judgment and the grave.
And when betwixt the quick and dead the young fair queen had vowed,
The living shouted 'May she live! Victoria, live!' aloud:
And as the loyal shouts went up, true spirits prayed between,
'The blessings happy monarchs have be thine, O crownèd queen!'

III

But now before her people's face she bendeth hers anew,
And calls them, while she vows, to be her witness thereunto.
She vowed to rule, and in that oath her childhood put away:
She doth maintain her womanhood, in vowing love to-day.
O lovely lady! let her vow! such lips become such vows,
And fairer goeth bridal wreath than crown with vernal brows.
O lovely lady! let her vow! yea, let her vow to love!
And though she be no less a queen, with purples hung above,
The pageant of a court behind, the royal kin around,
And woven gold to catch her looks turned maidenly to ground,
Yet may the bride-veil hide from her a little of that state,
While loving hopes for retinues about her sweetness wait.
SHE vows to love who vowed to rule — (the chosen at her side)
Let none say, God preserve the queen! but rather, Bless the bride!
None blow the trump, none bend the knee, none violate the dream
Wherein no monarch but a wife she to herself may seem.
Or if ye say, Preserve the queen! oh, breathe it inward low —
She is a *woman*, and *beloved!* and 't is enough but so.
Count it enough, thou noble prince who tak'st her by the hand
And claimest for thy lady-love our lady of the land!
And since, Prince Albert, men have called thy spirit high and rare,
And true to truth and brave for truth as some at Augsburg were,
We charge thee by thy lofty thoughts and by thy poet-mind
Which not by glory and degree takes measure of mankind,
Esteem that wedded hand less dear for sceptre than for ring,
And hold her uncrowned womanhood to be the royal thing.

IV

And now, upon our queen's last vow what blessings shall we pray?
None straitened to a shallow crown will suit our lips to-day: 60
Behold, they must be free as love, they must be broad as free,
Even to the borders of heaven's light and earth's humanity.
Long live she! — send up loyal shouts, and true hearts pray between, —
'The blessings happy PEASANTS have, be thine, O crownèd queen!'

CROWNED AND BURIED

First printed in the *Athenæum* for July 4, 1840, as 'Napoleon's Return.' On the 8th of the same month Miss Barrett wrote from Beacon Terrace, Torquay, to H. S. Boyd: 'The subject of the removal of Napoleon's ashes is a fitter subject for you than for me. Napoleon is no idol of mine. *I* never made a "setting sun" of him. But my physician suggested the subject as a noble one, and then there was something suggestive in the consideration that the Bellerophon lay on those very bay-waters opposite my bed.'

I

NAPOLEON! — years ago, and that great word
Compàct of human breath in hate and dread
And exultation, skied us overhead —
An atmosphere whose lightning was the sword
Scathing the cedars of the world, — drawn down
In burnings, by the metal of a crown.

II

Napoleon! — nations, while they cursed that name,
Shook at their own curse; and while others bore
Its sound, as of a trumpet, on before,
Brass-fronted legions justified its fame;
And dying men on trampled battle-sods
Near their last silence uttered it for God's.

III

Napoleon! — sages, with high foreheads drooped,
Did use it for a problem; children small
Leapt up to greet it, as at manhood's call;
Priests blessed it from their altars overstooped
By meek-eyed Christs; and widows with a moan
Spake it, when questioned why they sat alone.

IV

That name consumed the silence of the snows
In Alpine keeping, holy and cloud-hid;
The mimic eagles dared what Nature's did,
And over-rushed her mountainous repose
In search of eyries: and the Egyptian river
Mingled the same word with its grand 'For ever.'

V

That name was shouted near the pyramidal
Nilotic tombs, whose mummied habitants,
Packed to humanity's significance,
Motioned it back with stillness, — shouts as idle
As hireling artists' work of myrrh and spice
Which swathed last glories round the Ptolemies.

VI

The world's face changed to hear it; kingly men
Came down in chidden babes' bewilderment
From autocratic places, each content
With sprinkled ashes for anointing: then
The people laughed or wondered for the nonce,
To see one throne a composite of thrones.

VII

Napoleon! — even the torrid vastitude
Of India felt in throbbings of the air
That name which scattered by disastrous blare
All Europe's bound-lines, — drawn afresh in blood.
Napoleon! — from the Russias west to Spain:
And Austria trembled till ye heard her chain.

VIII

And Germany was 'ware; and Italy
Oblivious of old fames — her laurel-locked,

High-ghosted Cæsars passing uninvoked —
Did crumble her own ruins with her knee,
To serve a newer: ay! but Frenchmen cast
A future from them nobler than their past:

IX

For verily though France augustly rose
With that raised NAME, and did assume by such
The purple of the world, none gave so much
As she in purchase — to speak plain, in loss —
Whose hands, toward freedom stretched, dropped paralyzed
To wield a sword or fit an undersized

X

King's crown to a great man's head. And though along
Her Paris' streets did float on frequent streams
Of triumph, pictured or enmarbled dreams
Dreamt right by genius in a world gone wrong, —
No dream of all so won was fair to see
As the lost vision of her liberty.

XI

Napoleon! — 't was a high name lifted high:
It met at last God's thunder sent to clear
Our compassing and covering atmosphere
And open a clear sight beyond the sky
Of supreme empire; this of earth's was done —
And kings crept out again to feel the sun.

XII

The kings crept out — the peoples sat at home,
And finding the long-invocated peace
(A pall embroidered with worn images
Of rights divine) too scant to cover doom
Such as they suffered, cursed the corn that grew
Rankly, to bitter bread, on Waterloo.

XIII

A deep gloom centred in the deep repose;
The nations stood up mute to count their dead:
And he who owned the NAME which vibrated
Through silence, — trusting to his noblest foes
When earth was all too gray for chivalry,
Died of their mercies 'mid the desert sea.

XIV

O wild Saint Helen! very still she kept him,
With a green willow for all pyramid,
Which stirred a little if the low wind did,
A little more if pilgrims overwept him,
Disparting the lithe boughs to see the clay
Which seemed to cover his for judgment-day.

XV

Nay, not so long! France kept her old affection
As deeply as the sepulchre the corse;
Until, dilated by such love's remorse
To a new angel of the resurrection,
She cried 'Behold, thou England! I would have
The dead, whereof thou wottest, from that grave.'

XVI

And England answered in the courtesy
Which, ancient foes turned lovers, may befit:
'Take back thy dead! and when thou buriest it,
Throw in all former strifes 'twixt thee and me.'
Amen, mine England! 't is a courteous claim:
But ask a little room too — for thy shame!

XVII

Because it was not well, it was not well,
Nor tuneful with thy lofty-chanted part
Among the Oceanides, — that Heart
To bind and bare and vex with vulture fell.
I would, my noble England, men might seek
All crimson stains upon thy breast — not cheek!

XVIII

I would that hóstile fleets had scarred Torbay,
Instead of the lone ship which waited moored

Until thy princely purpose was assured,
Then left a shadow, not to pass away —
Not for to-night's moon, nor to-morrow's sun:
Green watching hills, ye witnessed what was done!

XIX

But since it *was* done, — in sepulchral dust
We fain would pay back something of our debt
To France, if not to honor, and forget,
How through much fear we falsified the trust
Of a fallen foe and exile. We return
Orestes to Electra — in his urn.

XX

A little urn — a little dust inside,
Which once outbalanced the large earth, albeit
To-day a four-years child might carry it
Sleek-browed and smiling, 'Let the burden 'bide!'
Orestes to Electra! — O fair town
Of Paris, how the wild tears will run down

XXI

And run back in the chariot-marks of time,
When all the people shall come forth to meet
The passive victor, death-still in the street
He rode through 'mid the shouting and bell-chime
And martial music, under eagles which
Dyed their rapacious beaks at Austerlitz!

XXII

Napoleon! — he hath come again, borne home
Upon the popular ebbing heart, — a sea
Which gathers its own wrecks perpetually,
Majestically moaning. Give him room!
Room for the dead in Paris! welcome solemn
And grave-deep, 'neath the cannon-moulded column!

XXIII

There, weapon spent and warrior spent may rest
From roar of fields, — provided Jupiter
Dare trust Saturnus to lie down so near
His bolts! — and this he may: for, dispossessed
Of any godship lies the godlike arm —
The goat, Jove sucked, as likely to do harm.

XXIV

And yet . . . Napoleon! — the recovered name
Shakes the old casements of the world; and we
Look out upon the passing pageantry,
Attesting that the Dead makes good his claim
To a French grave, — another kingdom won,
The last, of few spans — by Napoleon.

XXV

Blood fell like dew beneath his sunrise — sooth
But glittered dew-like in the covenanted
Meridian light. He was a despot — granted!
But the *αὐτός* of his autocratic mouth
Said yea i' the people's French; he magnified
The image of the freedom he denied:

XXVI

And if they asked for rights, he made reply
'Ye have my glory!' — and so, drawing round them
His ample purple, glorified and bound them
In an embrace that seemed identity.
He ruled them like a tyrant — true! but none
Were ruled like slaves: each felt Napoleon.

XXVII

I do not praise this man: the man was flawed
For Adam — much more, Christ! — his knee unbent,
His hand unclean, his aspiration pent
Within a sword-sweep — pshaw! — but since he had
The genius to be loved, why, let him have
The justice to be honored in his grave.

XXVIII

I think this nation's tears thus poured together,
Better than shouts. I think this funeral

Grander than crownings, though a Pope
bless all.
I think this grave stronger than thrones.
But whether
The crowned Napoleon or the buried clay
Be worthier, I discern not: angels may.

TO FLUSH, MY DOG

First printed in the *Athenæum*, July 22, 1843. 'This dog,' says the author, 'was the gift of my dear and admired friend, Miss Mitford, and belongs to the beautiful race she has rendered celebrated among English and American readers. The Flushes have their laurels as well as the Cæsars, — the chief difference (at least the very head and front of it) consisting, perhaps, in the bald head of the latter under the crown.'

I

Loving friend, the gift of one
Who her own true faith has run
Through thy lower nature,
Be my benediction said
With my hand upon thy head,
Gentle fellow-creature!

II

Like a lady's ringlets brown,
Flow thy silken ears adown
Either side demurely
Of thy silver-suited breast
Shining out from all the rest
Of thy body purely.

III

Darkly brown thy body is,
Till the sunshine striking this
Alchemize its dulness,
When the sleek curls manifold
Flash all over into gold
With a burnished fulness.

IV

Underneath my stroking hand,
Startled eyes of hazel bland
Kindling, growing larger,
Up thou leapest with a spring,
Full of prank and curveting,
Leaping like a charger.

V

Leap! thy broad tail waves a light,
Leap! thy slender feet are bright,
Canopied in fringes;
Leap! those tasselled ears of thine
Flicker strangely, fair and fine
Down their golden inches.

VI

Yet, my pretty, sportive friend,
Little is 't to such an end
That I praise thy rareness;
Other dogs may be thy peers
Haply in these drooping ears
And this glossy fairness.

VII

But of *thee* it shall be said,
This dog watched beside a bed
Day and night unweary,
Watched within a curtained room
Where no sunbeam brake the gloom
Round the sick and dreary.

VIII

Roses, gathered for a vase,
In that chamber died apace,
Beam and breeze resigning;
This dog only, waited on,
Knowing that when light is gone
Love remains for shining.

IX

Other dogs in thymy dew
Tracked the hares and followed through
Sunny moor or meadow;
This dog only, crept and crept
Next a languid cheek that slept,
Sharing in the shadow.

X

Other dogs of loyal cheer
Bounded at the whistle clear,
Up the woodside hieing;
This dog only, watched in reach
Of a faintly uttered speech
Or a louder sighing.

XI

And if one or two quick tears
Dropped upon his glossy ears
Or a sigh came double,
Up he sprang in eager haste,
Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,
In a tender trouble.

XII

And this dog was satisfied
If a pale thin hand would glide

Down his dewlaps sloping, —
Which he pushed his nose within,
After, — platforming his chin
On the palm left open.

XIII

This dog, if a friendly voice
Call him now to blither choice
Than such chamber-keeping,
'Come out!' praying from the door, —
Presseth backward as before,
Up against me leaping.

XIV

Therefore to this dog will I,
Tenderly not scornfully,
Render praise and favor:
With my hand upon his head,
Is my benediction said
Therefore and for ever.

XV

And because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do
Often man or woman,
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men,
Leaning from my Human.

XVI

Blessings on thee, dog of mine,
Pretty collars make thee fine,
Sugared milk make fat thee!
Pleasures wag on in thy tail,
Hands of gentle motion fail
Nevermore, to pat thee!

XVII

Downy pillow take thy head,
Silken coverlid bestead,
Sunshine help thy sleeping!
No fly's buzzing wake thee up,
No man break thy purple cup
Set for drinking deep in.

XVIII

Whiskered cats arointed flee,
Sturdy stoppers keep from thee
Cologne distillations;
Nuts lie in thy path for stones,
And thy feast-day macaroons
Turn to daily rations!

XIX

Mock I thee, in wishing weal? —
Tears are in my eyes to feel
Thou art made so straitly,
Blessing needs must straiten too, —
Little canst thou joy or do,
Thou who lovest *greatly*.

XX

Yet be blessèd to the height
Of all good and all delight
Pervious to thy nature;
Only *loved* beyond that line,
With a love that answers thine,
Loving fellow-creature!

THE FOURFOLD ASPECT

I

When ye stood up in the house
With your little childish feet,
And, in touching Life's first shows,
First the touch of Love did meet, —
Love and Nearness seeming one,
By the heartlight cast before,
And of all Beloveds, none
Standing farther than the door;
Not a name being dear to thought,
With its owner beyond call;
Not a face, unless it brought
Its own shadow to the wall;
When the worst recorded change
Was of apple dropt from bough,
When love's sorrow seemed more strange
Than love's treason can seem now; —
Then, the Loving took you up
Soft, upon their elder knees,
Telling why the statues droop
Underneath the churchyard trees,
And how ye must lie beneath them
Through the winters long and deep,
Till the last trump overbreathe them,
And ye smile out of your sleep.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if they said
A tale of fairy ships
With a swan-wing for a sail;
Oh, ye kissed their loving lips
For the merry merry tale —
So carelessly ye thought upon the Dead!

II

Soon ye read in solemn stories
Of the men of long ago,
Of the pale bewildering glories
Shining farther than we know;

Of the heroes with the laurel,
Of the poets with the bay,
Of the two worlds' earnest quarrel
For that beauteous Helena;
How Achilles at the portal
Of the tent heard footsteps nigh,
And his strong heart, half-immortal,
Met the *keitai* with a cry;
How Ulysses left the sunlight
For the pale eidola race
Blank and passive through the dun light,
Staring blindly in his face;
How that true wife said to Pætus,
With calm smile and wounded heart,
'Sweet, it hurts not!' How Admetus
Saw his blessed one depart;
How King Arthur proved his mission,
And Sir Roland wound his horn,
And at Sangreal's moony vision
Swords did bristle round like corn.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed, the while ye read,
That this Death, then, must be found
A Valhalla for the crowned,
The heroic who prevail:
None, be sure can enter in
Far below a paladin
Of a noble noble tale —
So awfully ye thought upon the Dead!

III

Ay, but soon ye woke up shrieking,
As a child that wakes at night
From a dream of sisters speaking
In a garden's summer-light, —
That wakes, starting up and bounding,
In a lonely lonely bed,
With a wall of darkness round him,
Stifling black about his head!
And the full sense of your mortal
Rushed upon you deep and loud,
And ye heard the thunder hurtle
From the silence of the cloud.
Funeral-torches at your gateway
Threw a dreadful light within.
All things changed: you rose up straightway,
And saluted Death and Sin.
Since, your outward man has rallied,
And your eye and voice grown bold;
Yet the Sphinx of Life stands pallid,
With her saddest secret told.
Happy places have grown holy:
If ye went where once ye went,
Only tears would fall down slowly,
As at solemn sacrament.
Merry books, once read for pastime,
If ye dared to read again,
Only memories of the last time
Would swim darkly up the brain.
Household names, which used to flutter
Through your laughter unawares, —
God's Divinest ye could utter
With less trembling in your prayers.
Ye have dropt adown your head, and it seems as if ye tread
On your own hearts in the path
Ye are called to in His wrath,
And your prayers go up in wail
—'Dost Thou see, then, all our loss,
O Thou agonized on cross?
Art thou reading all its tale?'
So mournfully ye think upon the Dead!

IV

Pray, pray, thou who also weepest,
And the drops will slacken so.
Weep, weep, and the watch thou keepest
With a quicker count will go.
Think: the shadow on the dial
For the nature most undone,
Marks the passing of the trial,
Proves the presence of the sun.
Look, look up, in starry passion,
To the throne above the spheres:
Learn: the spirit's gravitation
Still must differ from the tear's.
Hope: with all the strength thou usest
In embracing thy despair.
Love: the earthly love thou losest
Shall return to thee more fair.
Work: make clear the forest-tangles
Of the wildest stranger-land.
Trust: the blessèd deathly angels
Whisper, 'Sabbath hours at hand!'
By the heart's wound when most gory,
By the longest agony,
Smile! Behold in sudden glory
The TRANSFIGURED smiles on *thee!*
And ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if He said,
'My Belovèd, is it so?
Have ye tasted of my woe?
Of my Heaven ye shall not fail!'
He stands brightly where the shade is,

With the keys of Death and Hades,
And there, ends the mournful tale —
So hopefully ye think upon the Dead!

A FLOWER IN A LETTER

I

My lonely chamber next the sea
Is full of many flowers set free
By summer's earliest duty:
Dear friends upon the garden-walk
Might stop amid their fondest talk
To pull the least in beauty.

II

A thousand flowers, each seeming one
That learnt by gazing on the sun
To counterfeit his shining;
Within whose leaves the holy dew
That falls from heaven has won anew
A glory, in declining.

III

Red roses, used to praises long,
Contented with the poet's song,
The nightingale's being over;
And lilies white, prepared to touch
The whitest thought, nor soil it much,
Of dreamer turned to lover.

IV

Deep violets, you liken to
The kindest eyes that look on you,
Without a thought disloyal;
And cactuses a queen might don
If weary of a golden crown,
And still appear as royal.

V

Pansies for ladies all, — I wis
That none who wear such brooches miss
A jewel in the mirror;
And tulips, children love to stretch
Their fingers down, to feel in each
Its beauty's secret nearer.

VI

Love's language may be talked with these;
To work out choicest sentences,
No blossoms can be meeter;
And, such being used in Eastern bowers,
Young maids may wonder if the flowers
Or meanings be the sweeter.

VII

And such being strewn before a bride,
Her little foot may turn aside,
Their longer bloom decreeing,
Unless some voice's whispered sound
Should make her gaze upon the ground
Too earnestly for seeing.

VIII

And such being scattered on a grave,
Whoever mourneth there may have
A type which seemeth worthy
Of that fair body hid below,
Which bloomed on earth a time ago,
Then perished as the earthy.

IX

And such being wreathed for worldly feast,
Across the brimming cup some guest
Their rainbow colors viewing
May feel them, with a silent start,
The covenant, his childish heart
With nature made, renewing.

X

No flowers our gardened England hath
To match with these, in bloom and breath,
Which from the world are hiding
In sunny Devon moist with rills, —
A nunnery of cloistered hills,
The elements presiding.

XI

By Loddon's stream the flowers are fair
That meet one gifted lady's care
With prodigal rewarding:
(For Beauty is too used to run
To Mitford's bower — to want the sun
To light her through the garden).

XII

But here, all summers are comprised,
The nightly frosts shrink exorcised
Before the priestly moonshine;
And every wind with stolèd feet
In wandering down the alleys sweet
Steps lightly on the sunshine.

XIII

And (having promised Harpocrate
Among the nodding roses that

No harm shall touch his daughters)
Gives quite away the rushing sound
He dares not use upon such ground
To ever-trickling waters.

XIV

Yet, sun and wind! what can ye do
But make the leaves more brightly show
In posies newly gathered?
I look away from all your best
To one poor flower unlike the rest,
A little flower half-withered.

XV

I do not think it ever was
A pretty flower, — to make the grass
Look greener where it reddened;
And now it seems ashamed to be
Alone, in all this company,
Of aspect shrunk and saddened.

XVI

A chamber-window was the spot
It grew in, from a garden-pot,
Among the city shadows:
If any, tending it, might seem
To smile, 't was only in a dream
Of nature in the meadows.

XVII

How coldly on its head did fall
The sunshine, from the city wall
In pale refraction driven!
How sadly plashed upon its leaves
The raindrops, losing in the eaves
The first sweet news of heaven!

XVIII

And those who planted, gathered it
In gamesome or in loving fit,
And sent it as a token
Of what their city pleasures be, —
For one, in Devon by the sea
And garden blooms, to look on.

XIX

But SHE for whom the jest was meant,
With a grave passion innocent
Receiving what was given, —
Oh, if her face she turnèd then,
Let none say 't was to gaze again
Upon the flowers of Devon!

XX

Because, whatever virtue dwells
In genial skies, warm oracles
For gardens brightly springing, —
The flower which grew beneath your eyes,
Belovèd friends, to mine supplies
A beauty worthier singing!

THE CRY OF THE HUMAN

First printed in *Graham's American Magazine*, 1842.

I

'THERE is no God' the foolish saith,
But none 'There is no sorrow,'
And nature oft the cry of faith
In bitter need will borrow:
Eyes, which the preacher could not school,
By wayside graves are raisèd,
And lips say 'God be pitiful,'
Who ne'er said 'God be praisèd.'
Be pitiful, O God!

II

The tempest stretches from the steep
The shadow of its coming,
The beasts grow tame and near us creep,
As help were in the human;
Yet, while the cloud-wheels roll and grind,
We spirits tremble under —
The hills have echoes, but we find
No answer for the thunder.
Be pitiful, O God!

III

The battle hurtles on the plains,
Earth feels new scythes upon her;
We reap our brothers for the wains,
And call the harvest — honor:
Draw face to face, front line to line,
One image all inherit, —
Then kill, curse on, by that same sign,
Clay — clay, and spirit — spirit.
Be pitiful, O God!

IV

The plague runs festering through the town,
And never a bell is tolling,
And corpses, jostled 'neath the moon,
Nod to the dead-cart's rolling:
The young child calleth for the cup,
The strong man brings it weeping,
The mother from her babe looks up,

And shrieks away its sleeping.
Be pitiful, O God!

V

The plague of gold strikes far and near,
And deep and strong it enters;
This purple chimar which we wear
Makes madder than the centaur's:
Our thoughts grow blank, our words grow strange,
We cheer the pale gold-diggers,
Each soul is worth so much on 'Change,
And marked, like sheep, with figures.
Be pitiful, O God!

VI

The curse of gold upon the land
The lack of bread enforces;
The rail-cars snort from strand to strand,
Like more of Death's White Horses:
The rich preach 'rights' and 'future days,'
And hear no angel scoffing,
The poor die mute, with starving gaze
On corn-ships in the offing.
Be pitiful, O God!

VII

We meet together at the feast,
To private mirth betake us;
We stare down in the winecup, lest
Some vacant chair should shake us:
We name delight, and pledge it round —
'It shall be ours to-morrow!'
God's seraphs, do your voices sound
As sad, in naming sorrow?
Be pitiful, O God!

VIII

We sit together, with the skies,
The steadfast skies, above us,
We look into each other's eyes,
'And how long will you love us?'
The eyes grow dim with prophecy,
The voices, low and breathless, —
'Till death us part!' — O words, to be
Our *best*, for love the deathless!
Be pitiful, O God!

IX

We tremble by the harmless bed
Of one loved and departed:
Our tears drop on the lips that said
Last night 'Be stronger-hearted!'
O God — to clasp those fingers close,
And yet to feel so lonely!
To see a light upon such brows,
Which is the daylight only!
Be pitiful, O God!

X

The happy children come to us
And look up in our faces;
They ask us 'Was it thus, and thus,
When we were in their places?'
We cannot speak; — we see anew
The hills we used to live in,
And feel our mother's smile press through
The kisses she is giving.
Be pitiful, O God!

XI

We pray together at the kirk
For mercy, mercy solely:
Hands weary with the evil work,
We lift them to the Holy.
The corpse is calm below our knee,
Its spirit, bright before Thee:
Between them, worse than either, we —
Without the rest or glory.
Be pitiful, O God!

XII

We leave the communing of men,
The murmur of the passions,
And live alone, to live again
With endless generations:
Are we so brave? The sea and sky
In silence lift their mirrors,
And, glassed therein, our spirits high
Recoil from their own terrors.
Be pitiful, O God!

XIII

We sit on hills our childhood wist,
Woods, hamlets, streams, beholding
The sun strikes through the farthest mist
The city's spire to golden:
The city's golden spire it was,
When hope and health were strongest,
But now it is the churchyard grass
We look upon the longest.
Be pitiful, O God!

XIV

And soon all vision waxeth dull;
Men whisper 'He is dying;'
We cry no more 'Be pitiful!'
We have no strength for crying:

No strength, no need. Then, soul of mine,
Look up and triumph rather!
Lo, in the depth of God's Divine,
The Son adjures the Father,
Be pitiful, O God!

A LAY OF THE EARLY ROSE

'. . . discordance that can accord.'
— *Romaunt of the Rose.*

A rose once grew within
A garden April-green,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
And the fairer for that oneness.

A white rose delicate
On a tall bough and straight:
Early comer, early comer,
Never waiting for the summer.

Her pretty gestes did win
South winds to let her in,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
All the fairer for that oneness.

'For if I wait,' said she,
'Till time for roses be,
For the moss-rose and the musk-rose,
Maiden-blush and royal-dusk rose,

'What glory then for me
In such a company? —
Roses plenty, roses plenty
And one nightingale for twenty!

'Nay, let me in,' said she,
'Before the rest are free,
In my loneness, in my loneness,
All the fairer for that oneness.

'For I would lonely stand
Uplifting my white hand,
On a mission, on a mission,
To declare the coming vision.

'Upon which lifted sign,
What worship will be mine!
What addressing, what caressing,
And what thanks and praise and blessing!

'A windlike joy will rush
Through every tree and bush,
Bending softly in affection
And spontaneous benediction.

'Insects, that only may
Live in a sunbright ray,
To my whiteness, to my whiteness,
Shall be drawn as to a brightness, —

'And every moth and bee
Approach me reverently,
Wheeling o'er me, wheeling o'er me,
Coronals of motioned glory.

'Three larks shall leave a cloud,
To my whiter beauty vowed,
Singing gladly all the moontide,
Never waiting for the suntide.

'Ten nightingales shall flee
Their woods for love of me,
Singing sadly all the suntide,
Never waiting for the moontide.

'I ween the very skies
Will look down with surprise,
When below on earth they see me
With my starry aspect dreamy.

'And earth will call her flowers
To hasten out of doors,
By their curtsies and sweet-smelling
To give grace to my foretelling.'

So praying, did she win
South winds to let her in,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
And the fairer for that oneness.

But ah, — alas for her!
No thing did minister
To her praises, to her praises,
More than might unto a daisy's.

No tree nor bush was seen
To boast a perfect green,
Scarcely having, scarcely having
One leaf broad enough for waving.

The little flies did crawl
Along the southern wall,
Faintly shifting, faintly shifting
Wings scarce long enough for lifting.

The lark, too high or low,
I ween, did miss her so,

With his nest down in the gorses,
And his song in the star-courses.

The nightingale did please
To loiter beyond seas:
Guess him in the Happy Islands,
Learning music from the silence!

Only the bee, forsooth,
Came in the place of both,
Doing honor, doing honor
To the honey-dews upon her.

The skies looked coldly down
As on a royal crown;
Then with drop for drop, at leisure,
They began to rain for pleasure.

Whereat the earth did seem
To waken from a dream,
Winter-frozen, winter-frozen,
Her unquiet eyes unclosing —

Said to the Rose, 'Ha, snow!
And art thou fallen so?
Thou, who wast enthronèd stately
All along my mountains lately?

'Holla, thou world-wide snow!
And art thou wasted so,
With a little bough to catch thee,
And a little bee to watch thee?'

— Poor Rose, to be misknown!
Would she had ne'er been blown,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
All the sadder for that oneness!

Some word she tried to say,
Some *no* . . . ah, wellaway!
But the passion did o'ercome her,
And the fair frail leaves dropped from her.

— Dropped from her fair and mute,
Close to a poet's foot,
Who beheld them, smiling slowly,
As at something sad yet holy, —

Said 'Verily and thus
It chances too with *us*
Poets, singing sweetest snatches
While that deaf men keep the watches:

'Vaunting to come before
Our own age evermore,
In a loneness, in a loneness,
And the nobler for that oneness.

'Holy in voice and heart,
To high ends, set apart:
All unmated, all unmated,
Just because so consecrated.

'But if alone we be,
Where is our empery?
And if none can reach our stature,
Who can mete our lofty nature?

'What bell will yield a tone,
Swung in the air alone?
If no brazen clapper bringing,
Who can hear the chimèd ringing?

'What angel but would seem
To sensual eyes, ghost-dim?
And without assimilation
Vain is interpenetration.

'And thus, what can we do,
Poor rose and poet too,
Who both antedate our mission
In an unpreparèd season?

'Drop, leaf! be silent, song!
Cold things we come among:
We must warm them, we must warm them,
Ere we ever hope to charm them.

'Howbeit' (here his face
Lightened around the place,
So to mark the outward turning
Of its spirit's inward burning)

'Something it is, to hold
In God's worlds manifold,
First revealed to creature-duty,
Some new form of his mild Beauty.

'Whether that form respect
The sense or intellect,
Holy be, in mood or meadow,
The Chief Beauty's sign and shadow!

'Holy, in me and thee,
Rose fallen from the tree, —
Though the world stand dumb around us,
All unable to expound us.

'Though none us deign to bless,
Blessèd are we, natheless;

Blessèd still and consecrated
In that, rose, we were created.

'Oh, shame to poet's lays
Sung for the dole of praise, —
Hoarsely sung upon the highway
With that *obolum da mihi!*

'Shame, shame to poet's soul
Pining for such a dole,
When Heaven-chosen to inherit
The high throne of a chief spirit!

Sit still upon your thrones,
O ye poetic ones!
And if, sooth, the world decry you,
Let it pass unchallenged by you.

'Ye to yourselves suffice,
Without its flatteries.
Self-contentedly approve you
Unto HIM who sits above you, —

'In prayers, that upward mount
Like to a fair-sunned fount
Which, in gushing back upon you,
Hath an upper music won you, —

'In faith, that still perceives
No rose can shed her leaves,
Far less, poet fall from mission,
With an unfulfilled fruition, —

'In hope, that apprehends
An end beyond these ends,
And great uses rendered duly
By the meanest song sung truly, —

'In thanks, for all the good
By poets understood,
For the sound of seraphs moving
Down the hidden depths of loving, —

'For sights of things away
Through fissures of the clay,
Promised things which *shall* be given
And sung over, up in Heaven, —

'For life, so lovely-vain,
For death, which breaks the chain,
For this sense of present sweetness,
And this yearning to completeness!'

BERTHA IN THE LANE

I

PUT the broidery-frame away,
For my sewing is all done:
The last thread is used to-day,
And I need not join it on.
Though the clock stands at the noon
I am weary. I have sewn,
Sweet, for thee, a wedding-gown.

II

Sister, help me to the bed,
And stand near me, Dearest-sweet.
Do not shrink nor be afraid,
Blushing with a sudden heat!
No one standeth in the street? —
By God's love I go to meet,
Love I thee with love complete.

III

Lean thy face down; drop it in
These two hands, that I may hold
'Twixt their palms thy cheek and chin,
Stroking back the curls of gold:
'T is a fair, fair face, in sooth —
Larger eyes and redder mouth
Than mine were in my first youth.

IV

Thou art younger by seven years —
Ah! — so bashful at my gaze,
That the lashes, hung with tears,
Grow too heavy to upraise?
I would wound thee by no touch
Which thy shyness feels as such.
Dost thou mind me, Dear, so much?

V

Have I not been nigh a mother
To thy sweetness — tell me, Dear?
Have we not loved one another
Tenderly, from year to year,
Since our dying mother mild
Said with accents undefiled,
'Child, be mother to this child!'

VI

Mother, mother, up in heaven,
Stand up on the jasper sea,
And be witness I have given
All the gifts required of me, —

Hope that blessed me, bliss that crowned,
Love that left me with a wound,
Life itself that turneth round!

VII

Mother, mother, thou art kind,
  Thou art standing in the room,
In a molten glory shrined
  That rays off into the gloom!
But thy smile is bright and bleak
Like cold waves — I cannot speak,
I sob in it, and grow weak.

VIII

Ghostly mother, keep aloof
  One hour longer from my soul,
For I still am thinking of
  Earth's warm-beating joy and dole!
On my finger is a ring
Which I still see glittering
When the night hides everything.

IX

Little sister, thou art pale!
  Ah, I have a wandering brain —
But I lose that fever-bale,
  And my thoughts grow calm again.
Lean down closer — closer still!
I have words thine ear to fill,
And would kiss thee at my will.

X

Dear, I heard thee in the spring,
  Thee and Robert — through the trees, —
When we all went gathering
  Boughs of may-bloom for the bees.
Do not start so! think instead
How the sunshine overhead
Seemed to trickle through the shade.

XI

What a day it was, that day!
  Hills and vales did openly
Seem to heave and throb away
  At the sight of the great sky:
And the silence, as it stood
In the glory's golden flood,
Audibly did bud, and bud.

XII

Through the winding hedgerows green,
  How we wandered, I and you,
With the bowery tops shut in,
  And the gates that showed the view!
How we talked there; thrushes soft
Sang our praises out, or oft
Bleatings took them from the croft:

XIII

Till the pleasure grown too strong
  Left me muter evermore,
And, the winding road being long,
  I walked out of sight, before,
And so, wrapt in musings fond,
Issued (past the wayside pond)
On the meadow-lands beyond.

XIV

I sate down beneath the beech
  Which leans over to the lane,
And the far sound of your speech
  Did not promise any pain;
And I blessed you full and free,
With a smile stooped tenderly
O'er the may-flowers on my knee.

XV

But the sound grew into word
  As the speakers drew more near —
Sweet, forgive me that I heard
  What you wished me not to hear.
Do not weep so, do not shake,
Oh, — I heard thee, Bertha, make
Good true answers for my sake.

XVI

Yes, and HE too! let him stand
  In thy thoughts, untouched by blame.
Could he help it, if my hand
  He had claimed with hasty claim?
That was wrong perhaps — but then
Such things be — and will, again.
Women cannot judge for men.

XVII

Had he seen thee when he swore
  He would love but me alone?
Thou wast absent, sent before
  To our kin in Sidmouth town.
When he saw thee who art blest
Past compare, and loveliest,
He but judged thee as the rest.

XVIII

Could we blame him with grave words,
  Thou and I, Dear, if we might?
Thy brown eyes have looks like birds
  Flying straightway to the light:
Mine are older. — Hush! — look out —

Up the street! Is none without?
How the poplar swings about!

XIX

And that hour — beneath the beech,
When I listened in a dream,
And he said in his deep speech
That he owed me all *esteem*, —
Each word swam in on my brain
With a dim, dilating pain,
Till it burst with that last strain.

XX

I fell flooded with a dark,
In the silence of a swoon.
When I rose, still cold and stark,
There was night; I saw the moon
And the stars, each in its place,
And the may-blooms on the grass
Seemed to wonder what I was.

XXI

And I walked as if apart
From myself, when I could stand,
And I pitied my own heart,
As if I held it in my hand —
Somewhat coldly, with a sense
Of fulfilled benevolence,
And a 'Poor thing' negligence.

XXII

And I answered coldly too,
When you met me at the door;
And I only *heard* the dew
Dripping from me to the floor:
And the flowers, I bade you see,
Were too withered for the bee, —
As my life, henceforth, for me.

XXIII

Do not weep so — Dear, — heart-warm!
All was best as it befell.
If I say he did me harm,
I speak wild, — I am not well.
All his words were kind and good —
He esteemed me. Only, blood
Runs so faint in womanhood!

XXIV

Then I always was too grave, —
Like the saddest ballad sung, —
With that look, besides, we have
In our faces, who die young.
I had died, Dear, all the same;
Life's long, joyous, jostling game
Is too loud for my meek shame.

XXV

We are so unlike each other,
Thou and I, that none could guess
We were children of one mother,
But for mutual tenderness.
Thou art rose-lined from the cold,
And meant verily to hold
Life's pure pleasures manifold.

XXVI

I am pale as crocus grows
Close beside a rose-tree's root;
Whosoe'er would reach the rose,
Treads the crocus underfoot.
I, like may-bloom on thorn-tree,
Thou, like merry summer-bee, —
Fit that I be plucked for thee!

XXVII

Yet who plucks me? — no one mourns,
I have lived my season out,
And now die of my own thorns
Which I could not live without.
Sweet, be merry! How the light
Comes and goes! If it be night,
Keep the candles in my sight.

XXVIII

Are there footsteps at the door?
Look out quickly. Yea, or nay?
Some one might be waiting for
Some last word that I might say.
Nay? So best! — so angels would
Stand off clear from deathly road,
Not to cross the sight of God.

XXIX

Colder grow my hands and feet.
When I wear the shroud I made,
Let the folds lie straight and neat,
And the rosemary be spread,
That if any friend should come,
(To see *thee*, Sweet!) all the room
May be lifted out of gloom.

XXX

And, dear Bertha, let me keep
On my hand this little ring,
Which at nights, when others sleep,
I can still see glittering!
Let me wear it out of sight,

In the grave. — where it will light
All the dark up, day and night.

XXXI

On that grave drop not a tear!
Else, though fathom-deep the place,
Through the woollen shroud I wear
I shall feel it on my face.
Rather smile there, blessèd one,
Thinking of me in the sun,
Or forget me — smiling on!

XXXII

Art thou near me? nearer! so —
Kiss me close upon the eyes,
That the earthly light may go
Sweetly, as it used to rise
When I watched the morning-gray
Strike, betwixt the hills, the way
He was sure to come that day.

XXXIII

So, — no more vain words be said!
The hosannas nearer roll.
Mother, smile now on thy Dead,
I am death-strong in my soul.
Mystic Dove alit on cross,
Guide the poor bird of the snows
Through the snow-wind above loss!

XXXIV

Jesus, Victim, comprehending
Love's divine self-abnegation,
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,
And absorb the poor libation!
Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up, through angels' hands of fire!
I aspire while I expire.

THAT DAY

I

I stand by the river where both of us stood,
And there is but one shadow to darken the flood;
And the path leading to it, where both used to pass,
Has the step but of one, to take dew from the grass, —
One forlorn since that day.

II

The flowers of the margin are many to see;
None stoops at my bidding to pluck them for me.
The bird in the alder sings loudly and long, —
My low sound of weeping disturbs not his song,
As thy vow did, that day.

III

I stand by the river, I think of the vow;
Oh, calm as the place is, vow-breaker, be thou!
I leave the flower growing, the bird unreproved;
Would I trouble *thee* rather than *them*, my beloved, —
And my lover that day?

IV

Go, be sure of my love, by that treason forgiven;
Of my prayers, by the blessings they win thee from Heaven;
Of my grief — (guess the length of the sword by the sheath's)
By the silence of life, more pathetic than death's!
Go, — be clear of that day!

LOVED ONCE

I

I classed, appraising once,
Earth's lamentable sounds, — the welladay,
The jarring yea and nay,
The fall of kisses on unanswering clay,
The sobbed farewell, the welcome mournfuller, —
But all did leaven the air
With a less bitter leaven of sure despair
Than these words — 'I loved ONCE.'

II

And who saith 'I loved ONCE'?
Not angels, — whose clear eyes, love, love foresee,
Love, through eternity,
And by To Love do apprehend To Be.
Not God, called LOVE, his noble crown-name casting,

A light too broad for blasting:
The great God, changing not from everlasting,
Saith never 'I loved ONCE.'

III

Oh, never is 'Loved ONCE'
Thy word, Thou Victim-Christ, misprizèd friend !
Thy cross and curse may rend,
But having loved Thou lovest to the end.
This is man's saying — man's: too weak to move
One spherèd star above,
Man desecrates the eternal God-word Love
By his No More, and Once.

IV

How say ye 'We loved once,'
Blasphemers ? Is your earth not cold enow,
Mourners, without that snow ?
Ah friends, and would ye wrong each other so ?
And could ye say of some whose love is known,
Whose prayers have met your own,
Whose tears have fallen for you, whose smiles have shown
So long, — 'We loved them ONCE' ?

V

Could ye 'We loved her once'
Say calm of me, sweet friends, when out of sight ?
When hearts of better right
Stand in between me and your happy light ?
Or when, as flowers kept too long in the shade,
Ye find my colors fade,
And all that is not love in me decayed ?
Such words — Ye loved me ONCE !

VI

Could ye 'We loved her once'
Say cold of me when further put away
In earth's sepulchral clay,
When mute the lips which deprecate to-day ?
Not so ! not then — least then ! When life is shriven
And death's full joy is given, —
Of those who sit and love you up in heaven
Say not 'We loved them once.'

VII

Say never ye loved ONCE:
God is too near above, the grave beneath,
And all our moments breathe
Too quick in mysteries of life and death,
For such a word. The eternities avenge
Affections light of range.
There comes no change to justify that change,
Whatever comes — Loved ONCE !

VIII

And yet that same word ONCE
Is humanly acceptive. Kings have said,
Shaking a discrowned head,
'We ruled once,' — dotards, 'We once taught and led,'
Cripples once danced i' the vines, and bards approved,
Were once by scornings moved:
But love strikes one hour — LOVE ! Those *never* loved
Who dream that they loved ONCE.

A RHAPSODY OF LIFE'S PROGRESS

'Fill all the stops of life with tuneful breath.'
— *Poems on Man*, by CORNELIUS MATHEWS.

I

WE are born into life — it is sweet, it is strange.
We lie still on the knee of a mild Mystery
Which smiles with a change;
But we doubt not of changes, we know not of spaces,
The Heavens seem as near as our own mother's face is,
And we think we could touch all the stars that we see;
And the milk of our mother is white on our mouth;
And, with small childish hands, we are turning around
The apple of Life which another has found;
It is warm with our touch, not with sun of the south,
And we count, as we turn it, the red side for four.
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art sweet, thou art strange evermore !

II

Then all things look strange in the pure golden æther;
We walk through the gardens with hands linked together,
And the lilies look large as the trees;
And, as loud as the birds, sing the bloom-loving bees,
And the birds sing like angels, so mystical-fine,
And the cedars are brushing the archangels' feet,
And time is eternity, love is divine,
And the world is complete.
Now, God bless the child, — father, mother, respond!
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet.

III

Then we leap on the earth with the armor of youth,
And the earth rings again;
And we breathe out 'O Beauty!' we cry out 'O truth!'
And the bloom of our lips drops with wine,
And our blood runs amazed 'neath the calm hyaline;
The earth cleaves to the foot, the sun burns to the brain, —
What is this exultation? and what this despair? —
The strong pleasure is smiting the nerves into pain,
And we drop from the Fair as we climb to the Fair,
And we lie in a trance at its feet;
And the breath of an angel cold-piercing the air
Breathes fresh on our faces in swoon,
And we think him so near he is this side the sun,
And we wake to a whisper self-murmured and fond,
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet!

IV

And the winds and the waters in pastoral measures
Go winding around us, with roll upon roll,
Till the soul lies within in a circle of pleasures
Which hideth the soul:
And we run with the stag, and we leap with the horse,
And we swim with the fish through the broad watercourse,
And we strike with the falcon, and hunt with the hound,
And the joy which is in us flies out by a wound.
And we shout so aloud, 'We exult, we rejoice,'
That we lose the low moan of our brothers around:
And we shout so adeep down creation's profound,
We are deaf to God's voice.
And we bind the rose-garland on forehead and ears
Yet we are not ashamed,
And the dew of the roses that runneth unblamed
Down our cheeks, is not taken for tears.
Help us, God! trust us, man! love us, woman! 'I hold
Thy small head in my hands, — with its grapelets of gold
Growing bright through my fingers, — like altar for oath,
'Neath the vast golden spaces like witnessing faces
That watch the eternity strong in the troth —
I love thee, I leave thee,
Live for thee, die for thee!
I prove thee, deceive thee,
Undo evermore thee!
Help me, God! slay me, man! — one is mourning for both.'
And we stand up though young near the funeral-sheet
Which covers old Cæsar and old Pharamond,
And death is so nigh us, life cools from its heat.
O Life, O Beyond,
Art thou fair, *art* thou sweet?

V

Then we act to a purpose, we spring up erect:
We will tame the wild mouths of the wilderness-steeds,
We will plough up the deep in the ships double-decked,
We will build the great cities, and do the great deeds,

Strike the steel upon steel, strike the soul upon soul,
Strike the dole on the weal, overcoming the dole.
Let the cloud meet the cloud in a grand thunder-roll!
'While the eagle of Thought rides the tempest in scorn,
Who cares if the lightning is burning the corn?
Let us sit on the thrones
In a purple sublimity,
And grind down men's bones
To a pale unanimity.
Speed me, God! serve me, man! I am god over men;
When I speak in my cloud, none shall answer again;
'Neath the stripe and the bond,
Lie and mourn at my feet!'
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet!

VI

Then we grow into thought, and with inward ascensions
Touch the bounds of our Being.
We lie in the dark here, swathed doubly around
With our sensual relations and social conventions,
Yet are 'ware of a sight, yet are 'ware of a sound
Beyond Hearing and Seeing, —
Are aware that a Hades rolls deep on all sides
With its infinite tides
About and above us, — until the strong arch
Of our life creaks and bends as if ready for falling,
And through the dim rolling we hear the sweet calling
Of spirits that speak in a soft under-tongue
The sense of the mystical march:
And we cry to them softly, 'Come nearer, come nearer,
And lift up the lap of this dark, and speak clearer.
And teach us the song that ye sung!'
And we smile in our thought as they answer or no,
For to dream of a sweetness is sweet as to know.
Wonders breathe in our face
And we ask not their name;
Love takes all the blame
Of the world's prison-place;
And we sing back the songs as we guess them, aloud,
And we send up the lark of our music that cuts
Untired through the cloud
To beat with its wings at the lattice Heaven shuts;
Yet the angels look down and the mortals look up
As the little wings beat,
And the poet is blessed with their pity or hope.
'Twixt the heavens and the earth *can* a poet despond?
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet!

VII

Then we wring from our souls their applicative strength,
And bend to the cord the strong bow of our ken,
And bringing our lives to the level of others,
Hold the cup we have filled, to their uses at length.
'Help me, God! love me, man! I am man among men,
And my life is a pledge
Of the ease of another's!'
From the fire and the water we drive out the steam
With a rush and a roar and the speed of a dream;
And the car without horses, the car without wings,
Roars onward and flies
On its gray iron edge
'Neath the heat of a Thought sitting still in our eyes:
And our hand knots in air, with the bridge that it flings,
Two peaks far disrupted by ocean and skies,
And, lifting a fold of the smooth-flowing Thames,
Draws under the world with its turmoils and pothers,
While the swans float on softly, untouched in their calms

By humanity's hum at the root of the springs.
And with reachings of Thought we reach down to the deeps
Of the souls of our brothers,
We teach them full words with our slow-moving lips,
'God,' 'Liberty,' 'Truth,' — which they hearken and think
And work into harmony, link upon link,
'Till the silver meets round the earth gelid and dense,
Shedding sparks of electric responding intense
On the dark of eclipse.
Then we hear through the silence and glory afar,
As from shores of a star
In aphelion, the new generations that cry
Disenthralled by our voice to harmonious reply,
'God,' 'Liberty,' 'Truth!'
We are glorious forsooth,
And our name has a seat,
Though the shroud should be donned.
O Life, O Beyond,
Thou art strange, thou art sweet!

VIII

Help me, God! help me, man! I am low, I am weak:
Death loosens my sinews and creeps in my veins;
My body is cleft by these wedges of pains
From my spirit's serene,
And I feel the externe and insensate creep in
On my organized clay;
I sob not, nor shriek,
Yet I faint fast away:
I am strong in the spirit, — deep-thoughted, clear-eyed, —
I could walk, step for step, with an angel beside,
On the heaven-heights of truth.
Oh, the soul keeps its youth
But the body faints sore, it is tried in the race,
It sinks from the chariot ere reaching the goal,
It is weak, it is cold,
The rein drops from its hold,
It sinks back, with the death in its face.
On, chariot! on, soul!
Ye are all the more fleet —
Be alone at the goal
Of the strange and the sweet!

IX

Love us, God! love us, man! we believe, we achieve:
Let us love, let us live,
For the acts correspond;
We are glorious, and DIE:
And again on the knee of a mild Mystery
That smiles with a change,
Here we lie.
O Death, O Beyond,
Thou art sweet, thou art strange!

L. E. L.'S LAST QUESTION

'Do you think of me as I think of you?'
(*From her poem written during the voyage to the Cape.*)

First printed in the *Athenæum*, January 26, 1839.

I

'Do you think of me as I think of you,
My friends, my friends?' — She said it from the sea,
The English minstrel in her minstrelsy,
While, under brighter skies than erst she knew,
Her heart grew dark, and groped there as the blind
To reach across the waves friends left behind —
'Do you think of me as I think of you?'

II

It seemed not much to ask — 'as *I* of *you?*'
We all do ask the same; no eyelids cover
Within the meekest eyes that question over:
And little in the world the Loving do
But sit (among the rocks?) and listen for
The echo of their own love evermore —
'Do you think of me as I think of you?'

III

Love-learnèd she had sung of love and love, —
And like a child that, sleeping with dropt head
Upon the fairy-book he lately read,

Whatever household noises round him move,
Hears in his dream some elfin turbulence, —
Even so suggestive to her inward sense,
All sounds of life assumed one tune of love.

IV

And when the glory of her dream withdrew,
When knightly gestes and courtly pageantries
Were broken in her visionary eyes
By tears the solemn seas attested true, —
Forgetting that sweet lute beside her hand,
She asked not, — 'Do you praise me, O my land?'
But, — 'Think ye of me, friends, as I of you?'

V

Hers was the hand that played for many a year
Love's silver phrase for England, smooth and well.
Would God her heart's more inward oracle
In that lone moment might confirm her dear!
For when her questioned friends in agony
Made passionate response, 'We think of thee,'
Her place was in the dust, too deep to hear.

VI

Could she not wait to catch their answering breath?
Was she content, content with ocean's sound
Which dashed its mocking infinite around
One thirsty for a little love? — beneath
Those stars content, where last her song had gone, —
They mute and cold in radiant life, as soon
Their singer was to be, in darksome death?

VII

Bring your vain answers — cry, 'We think of thee!'
How think ye of her? warm in long ago
Delights? or crowned with budding bays? Not so.
None smile and none are crowned where lieth she,
With all her visions unfulfilled save one,
Her childhood's, of the palm-trees in the sun —
And lo! their shadow on her sepulchre!

VIII

'Do ye think of me as I think of you?'—
O friends, O kindred, O dear brotherhood
Of all the world! what are we that we should
For covenants of long affection sue?
Why press so near each other when the touch
Is barred by graves? Not much, and yet too much
Is this 'Think of me as I think of you.'

IX

But while on mortal lips I shape anew
A sigh to mortal issues, verily
Above the unshaken stars that see us die,
A vocal pathos rolls; and HE who drew
All life from dust, and for all tasted death,
By death and life and love appealing, saith
Do you think of me as I think of you?

THE HOUSE OF CLOUDS

First printed in the *Athenæum* August 21, 1841. On August 31, 1843, Miss Barrett wrote to R. H. Horne: 'Mr. Boyd told me that he had read my papers on the Greek fathers with the more satisfaction because he had inferred from my 'House of Clouds' that illness had *impaired my faculties.*' But to Mr. Boyd himself she wrote at about the same time with her usual invincible good humor and sweet independence: 'With regard to the 'House of Clouds,' I disagree both with you and Miss Mitford, thinking it, comparatively with my other poems, neither so bad nor so good as you two account it.' And, in this instance at least, her own judgment was certainly sound.

I

I WOULD build a cloudy House
For my thoughts to live in,
When for earth too fancy-loose,
And too low for heaven:
Hush! I talk my dream aloud,
I build it bright to see, —

I build it on the moonlit cloud
  To which I looked with *thee.*

II

Cloud-walls of the morning's gray,
  Faced with amber column,
Crowned with crimson cupola
  From a sunset solemn:
May-mists, for the casements, fetch,
  Pale and glimmering,
With a sunbeam hid in each
  And a smell of spring.

III

Build the entrance high and proud,
  Darkening and then brightening,
Of a riven thunder-cloud,
  Veinèd by the lightning:
Use one with an iris-stain
  For the door so thin,
Turning to a sound like rain
  As I enter in.

IV

Build a spacious hall thereby
  Boldly, never fearing;
Use the blue place of the sky
  Which the wind is clearing:
Branched with corridors sublime,
  Flecked with winding stairs,
Such as children wish to climb
  Following their own prayers.

V

In the mutest of the house
  I will have my chamber;
Silence at the door shall use
  Evening's light of amber,
Solemnizing every mood,
  Softening in degree,
Turning sadness into good
  As I turn the key.

VI

Be my chamber tapestried
  With the showers of summer,
Close, but soundless, glorified
  When the sunbeams come here —
Wandering harpers, harping on
  Waters stringed for such,
Drawing color, for a tune,
  With a vibrant touch.

VII

Bring a shadow green and still
  From the chestnut-forest,
Bring a purple from the hill,
  When the heat is sorest;
Spread them out from wall to wall,
  Carpet-wove around,
Whereupon the foot shall fall
  In light instead of sound.

VIII

Bring fantastic cloudlets home
  From the noontide zenith,
Ranged for sculptures round the room,
  Named as Fancy weeneth;
Some be Junos, without eyes,
  Naiads, without sources,
Some be birds of paradise,
  Some, Olympian horses.

IX

Bring the dews the birds shake off
  Waking in the hedges, —
Those too perfumed, for a proof,
  From the lilies' edges:
From our England's field and moor,
  Bring them calm and white in,
Whence to form a mirror pure
  For Love's self-delighting.

X

Bring a gray cloud from the east
  Where the lark is singing,
(Something of the song at least
  Unlost in the bringing):
That shall be a morning-chair,
  Poet-dream may sit in
When it leans out on the air,
  Unrhymed and unwritten.

XI

Bring the red cloud from the sun,
  While he sinketh catch it;
That shall be a couch, — with one
  Sidelong star to watch it, —
Fit for poet's finest thought
  At the curfew-sounding;
Things unseen being nearer brought
  Than the seen, around him.

XII

Poet's thought, — not poet's sigh.
  'Las, they come together:
Cloudy walls divide and fly
  As in April weather.
Cupola and column proud,
  Structure bright to see,

Gone! except that moonlit cloud
  To which I looked with *thee.*

XIII

Let them! Wipe such visionings
  From the fancy's cartel:
Love secures some fairer things,
  Dowered with his immortal.
The sun may darken, heaven be bowed,
  But still unchanged shall be, —
Here, in my soul, — that moonlit cloud
  To which I looked with THEE!

CATARINA TO CAMOENS

(DYING IN HIS ABSENCE ABROAD, AND REFERRING TO THE POEM IN WHICH HE RECORDED THE SWEETNESS OF HER EYES)

I

On the door you will not enter,
  I have gazed too long: adieu!
Hope withdraws her peradventure;
  Death is near me, — and not *you.*
    Come, O lover,
    Close and cover
These poor eyes, you called, I ween,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

II

When I heard you sing that burden
  In my vernal days and bowers,
Other praises disregarding,
  I but hearkened that of yours —
    Only saying
    In heart-playing,
'Blessed eyes mine eyes have been,
If the sweetest HIS have seen!'

III

But all changes. At this vesper,
  Cold the sun shines down the door.
If you stood there, would you whisper
  'Love, I love you,' as before, —
    Death pervading
    Now, and shading
Eyes you sang of, that yestreen,
As the sweetest ever seen?

IV

Yes. I think, were you beside them,
  Near the bed I die upon,
Though their beauty you denied them,
  As you stood there, looking down,
    You would truly
    Call them duly,
For the love's sake found therein,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

V

And if *you* looked down upon them,
  And if *they* looked up to *you,*
All the light which has forgone them
  Would be gathered back anew:
    They would truly
    Be as duly
Love-transformed to beauty's sheen,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

VI

But, ah me! you only see me,
  In your thoughts of loving man,
Smiling soft perhaps and dreamy
  Through the wavings of my fan;
    And unweeting
    Go repeating,
In your reverie serene,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen —'

VII

While my spirit leans and reaches
  From my body still and pale,
Fain to hear what tender speech is
  In your love to help my bale.
    O my poet,
    Come and show it!
Come, latest love, to glean
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

VIII

O my poet, O my prophet,
  When you praised their sweetness so,
Did you think, in singing of it,
    That it might be near to go?
    Had you fancies
    From their glances,
That the grave would quickly screen
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen'?

IX

No reply. The fountain's warble
  In the courtyard sounds alone.
As the water to the marble
  So my heart falls with a moan
    From love-sighing
    To this dying.

Death forerunneth Love to win
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

X

Will you come? When I 'm departed
Where all sweetnesses are hid,
Where thy voice, my tender-hearted,
Will not lift up either lid.
Cry, O lover,
Love is over!
Cry, beneath the cypress green,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XI

When the angelus is ringing,
Near the convent will you walk,
And recall the choral singing
Which brought angels down our talk?
Spirit-shriven
I viewed Heaven,
Till you smiled — 'Is earth unclean,
Sweetest eyes were ever seen?'

XII

When beneath the palace-lattice
You ride slow as you have done,
And you see a face there that is
Not the old familiar one, —
Will you oftly
Murmur softly,
'Here ye watched me morn and e'en,
Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XIII

When the palace-ladies, sitting
Round your gittern, shall have said,
'Poet, sing those verses written
For the lady who is dead,'
Will you tremble
Yet dissemble, —
Or sing hoarse, with tears between,
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen?'

XIV

'Sweetest eyes!' how sweet in flowings
The repeated cadence is!
Though you sang a hundred poems,
Still the best one would be this.
I can hear it
'Twixt my spirit
And the earth-noise intervene —
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XV

But the priest waits for the praying,
And the choir are on their knees,
And the soul must pass away in
Strains more solemn-high than these.
Miserere
For the weary!
Oh, no longer for Catrine
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XVI

Keep my riband, take and keep it,
(I have loosed it from my hair)
Feeling, while you overweep it,
Not alone in your despair,
Since with saintly
Watch unfaintly
Out of heaven shall o'er you lean
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

XVII

But — but *now* — yet unremovèd
Up to heaven, they glisten fast;
You may cast away, Belovèd,
In your future all my past:
Such old phrases
May be praises
For some fairer bosom-queen —
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen!'

XVIII

Eyes of mine, what are ye doing?
Faithless, faithless, — praised amis
If a tear be of your showing,
Dropt for any hope of HIS!
Death has boldness
Besides coldness,
If unworthy tears demean
'Sweetest eyes were ever seen.'

XIX

I will look out to his future;
I will bless it till it shine.
Should he ever be a suitor
Unto sweeter eyes than mine,
Sunshine gild them,
Angels shield them,
Whatsoever eyes terrene
Be the sweetest HIS have seen!

A PORTRAIT

'One name is Elizabeth.' — *Ben Jonson.*

I WILL paint her as I see her.
Ten times have the lilies blown
Since she looked upon the sun.

And her face is lily-clear,
Lily-shaped, and dropped in duty
To the law of its own beauty.

Oval cheeks encolored faintly,
Which a trail of golden hair
Keeps from fading off to air:

And a forehead fair and saintly,
Which two blue eyes undershine,
Like meek prayers before a shrine.

Face and figure of a child, —
Though too calm, you think, and tender,
For the childhood you would lend her.

Yet child-simple, undefiled,
Frank, obedient, waiting still
On the turnings of your will.

Moving light, as all young things,
As young birds, or early wheat
When the wind blows over it.

Only, free from flutterings
Of loud mirth that scorneth measure —
Taking love for her chief pleasure.

Choosing pleasures, for the rest,
Which come softly — just as she,
When she nestles at your knee.

Quiet talk she liketh best,
In a bower of gentle looks, —
Watering flowers, or reading books.

And her voice, it murmurs lowly,
As a silver stream may run,
Which yet feels (you feel) the sun.

And her smile it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common jestings are.

And if any poet knew her,
He would sing of her with falls
Used in lovely madrigals.

And if any painter drew her,
He would paint her unaware
With a halo round the hair.

And if reader read the poem,
He would whisper 'You have done a
Consecrated little Una.

And a dreamer (did you show him
That same picture) would exclaim,
''T is my angel, with a name!'

And a stranger, when he sees her
In the street even, smileth stilly,
Just as you would at a lily.

And all voices that address her,
Soften, sleeken every word,
As if speaking to a bird.

And all fancies yearn to cover
The hard earth, whereon she passes,
With the thymy-scented grasses.

And all hearts do pray 'God love her!'
Ay and always, in good sooth,
We may all be sure He doth.

SLEEPING AND WATCHING

I

Sleep on, baby, on the floor,
Tired of all the playing:
Sleep with smile the sweeter for
That, you dropped away in.
On your curls' full roundness stand
Golden lights serenely;
One cheek, pushed out by the hand
Folds the dimple inly:
Little head and little foot
Heavy laid for pleasure,
Underneath the lids half shut
Slants the shining azure.
Open-soul in noonday sun,
So you lie and slumber:
Nothing evil having done,
Nothing can encumber.

II

I, who cannot sleep as well,
Shall I sigh to view you?
Or sigh further to foretell
All that may undo you?
Nay, keep smiling, little child,
Ere the sorrow neareth:
I will smile too! patience mild
Pleasure's token weareth.
Nay, keep sleeping before loss:
I shall sleep though losing!
As by cradle, so by cross,
Sure is the reposing.

III

And God knows who sees us twain,
  Child at childish leisure,
I am near as tired of pain
  As you seem of pleasure.
Very soon too, by his grace
  Gently wrapt around me,
Shall I show as calm a face,
  Shall I sleep as soundly.
Differing in this, that you
  Clasp your playthings, sleeping,
While my hand shall drop the few
  Given to my keeping:
Differing in this, that I
  Sleeping shall be colder,
And in waking presently,
  Brighter to beholder:
Differing in this beside —
  (Sleeper, have you heard me ?
Do you move, and open wide
  Eyes of wonder toward me ?) —
That while you I thus recall
  From your sleep, I solely,
Me from mine an angel shall,
  With reveille holy.

WINE OF CYPRUS

GIVEN TO ME BY H. S. BOYD, AUTHOR OF 'SELECT PASSAGES FROM THE GREEK FATHERS,' ETC.

TO WHOM THESE STANZAS ARE ADDRESSED

I

If old Bacchus were the speaker,
  He would tell you with a sigh
Of the Cyprus in this beaker
  I am sipping like a fly, —
Like a fly or gnat on Ida
  At the hour of goblet-pledge,
By queen Juno brushed aside, a
  Full white arm-sweep, from the edge.

II

Sooth, the drinking should be ampler
  When the drink is so divine,
And some deep-mouthed Greek exemplar
  Would become your Cyprus wine:
Cyclops' mouth might plunge aright in,
  While his one eye overleered,
Nor too large were mouth of Titan
  Drinking rivers down his beard.

III

Pan might dip his head so deep in,
  That his ears alone pricked out,
Fauns around him pressing, leaping,
  Each one pointing to his throat:
While the Naiads, like Bacchantes,
  Wild, with urns thrown out to waste,
Cry, 'O earth, that thou wouldst grant us
  Springs to keep, of such a taste !'

IV

But for me, I am not worthy
  After gods and Greeks to drink,
And my lips are pale and earthy
  To go bathing from this brink:
Since you heard them speak the last time,
  They have faded from their blooms,
And the laughter of my pastime
  Has learnt silence at the tombs.

V

Ah, my friend ! the antique drinkers
  Crowned the cup and crowned the brow.
Can I answer the old thinkers
  In the forms they thought of, now ?
Who will fetch from garden-closes
  Some new garlands while I speak,
That the forehead, crowned with roses,
  May strike scarlet down the cheek ?

VI

Do not mock me ! with my mortal
  Suits no wreath again, indeed;
I am sad-voiced as the turtle
  Which Anacreon used to feed:
Yet as that same bird demurely
  Wet her beak in cup of his,
So, without a garland, surely
  I may touch the brim of this.

VII

Go, — let others praise the Chian !
  This is soft as Muses' string,
This is tawny as Rhea's lion,
  This is rapid as his spring,
Bright as Paphia's eyes e'er met us,
  Light as ever trod her feet;
And the brown bees of Hymettus
  Make their honey not so sweet.

VIII

Very copious are my praises,
  Though I sip it like a fly !
Ah — but, sipping, — times and places

Change before me suddenly:
As Ulysses' old libation
Drew the ghosts from every part,
So your Cyprus wine, dear Grecian,
Stirs the Hades of my heart.

IX

And I think of those long mornings
Which my thought goes far to seek,
When, betwixt the folio's turnings,
Solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek:
Past the pane the mountain spreading,
Swept the sheep's-bell's tinkling noise,
While a girlish voice was reading,
Somewhat low for *αι*'s and *οι*'s.

X

Then, what golden hours were for us!
While we sat together there,
How the white vests of the chorus
Seemed to wave up a live air!
How the cothurns trod majestic
Down the deep iambic lines,
And the rolling anapæstic
Curled like vapor over shrines!

XI

Oh, our Æschylus, the thunderous,
How he drove the bolted breath
Through the cloud, to wedge it ponderous
In the gnarlèd oak beneath!
Oh, our Sophocles, the royal,
Who was born to monarch's place,
And who made the whole world loyal
Less by kingly power than grace!

XII

Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres!
Our Theocritus, our Bion,
And our Pindar's shining goals! —
These were cup-bearers undying
Of the wine that 's meant for souls.

XIII

And my Plato, the divine one,
If men know the gods aright
By their motions as they shine on
With a glorious trail of light!
And your noble Christian bishops,
Who mouthed grandly the last Greek!
Though the sponges on their hyssops
Were distent with wine — too weak.

XIV

Yet, your Chrysostom, you praised him
As a liberal mouth of gold;
And your Basil, you upraised him
To the height of speakers old:
And we both praised Heliodorus
For his secret of pure lies, —
Who forged first his linkèd stories
In the heat of ladies' eyes.

XV

And we both praised your Synesius
For the fire shot up his odes,
Though the Church was scarce propitious
As he whistled dogs and gods.
And we both praised Nazianzen
For the fervid heart and speech:
Only I eschewed his glancing
At the lyre hung out of reach.

XVI

Do you mind that deed of Atè
Which you bound me to so fast, —
Reading 'De Virginitate,'
From the first line to the last?
How I said at ending, solemn
As I turned and looked at you,
That Saint Simeon on the column
Had had somewhat less to do?

XVII

For we sometimes gently wrangled,
Very gently, be it said,
Since our thoughts were disentangled
By no breaking of the thread!
And I charged you with extortions
On the nobler fames of old —
Ay, and sometimes thought your Porsons
Stained the purple they would fold.

XVIII

For the rest — a mystic moaning
Kept Cassandra at the gate,
With wild eyes the vision shone in,
And wide nostrils scenting fate.
And Prometheus, bound in passion
By brute Force to the blind stone,
Showed us looks of invocation
Turned to ocean and the sun.

XIX

And Medea we saw burning
At her nature's planted stake:
And proud Œdipus fate-scorning

While the cloud came on to break —
While the cloud came on slow, slower,
Till he stood discrowned, resigned ! —
But the reader's voice dropped lower
When the poet called him BLIND.

XX

Ah, my gossip ! you were older,
And more learnèd, and a man !
Yet that shadow, the enfolder
Of your quiet eyelids, ran
Both our spirits to one level;
And I turned from hill and lea
And the summer-sun's green revel,
To your eyes that could not see.

XXI

Now Christ bless you with the one light
Which goes shining night and day !
May the flowers which grow in sunlight
Shed their fragrance in your way !
Is it not right to remember
All your kindness, friend of mine,
When we two sat in the chamber,
And the poets poured us wine ?

XXII

So, to come back to the drinking
Of this Cyprus, — it is well,
But those memories, to my thinking,
Make a better œnomel;
And whoever be the speaker,
None can murmur with a sigh
That, in drinking from *that* beaker,
I am sipping like a fly.

THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAN'S NEST

'So the dreams depart,
So the fading phantoms flee,
And the sharp reality
Now must act its part.'
WESTWOOD'S *Beads from a Rosary.*

I

LITTLE Ellie sits alone
'Mid the beeches of a meadow,
By a stream-side on the grass,
And the trees are showering down
Doubles of their leaves in shadow
On her shining hair and face.

II

She has thrown her bonnet by,
And her feet she has been dipping
In the shallow water's flow:
Now she holds them nakedly
In her hands, all sleek and dripping,
While she rocketh to and fro.

III

Little Ellie sits alone,
And the smile she softly uses
Fills the silence like a speech,
While she thinks what shall be done,
And the sweetest pleasure chooses
For her future within reach.

IV

Little Ellie in her smile
Chooses — 'I will have a lover
Riding on a steed of steeds:
He shall love me without guile,
And to *him* I will discover
The swan's nest among the reeds.

V

'And the steed shall be red-roan,
And the lover shall be noble,
With an eye that takes the breath:
And the lute he plays upon
Shall strike ladies into trouble,
As his sword strikes men to death.

VI

'And the steed it shall be shod
All in silver, housed in azure,
And the mane shall swim the wind;
And the hoofs along the sod
Shall flash onward and keep measure,
Till the shepherds look behind.

VII

'But my lover will not prize
All the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes in my face:
He will say, "O Love, thine eyes
Build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace !"

VIII

'Then, ay, then he shall kneel low,
With the red-roan steed anear him
Which shall seem to understand,
Till I answer, "Rise and go !
For the world must love and fear him
Whom I gift with heart and hand."

IX

'Then he will arise so pale,
I shall feel my own lips tremble
With a *yes* I must not say,
Nathless maiden-brave, "Farewell,"
I will utter, and dissemble —
"Light to-morrow with to-day!"

X

'Then he 'll ride among the hills
To the wide world past the river,
There to put away all wrong;
To make straight distorted wills,
And to empty the broad quiver
Which the wicked bear along.

XI

'Three times shall a young foot-page
Swim the stream and climb the mountain
And kneel down beside my feet —
"Lo, my master sends this gage,
Lady, for thy pity's counting!
What wilt thou exchange for it?"

XII

'And the first time I will send
A white rosebud for a guerdon,
And the second time, a glove;
But the third time — I may bend
From my pride, and answer — "Pardon
If he comes to take my love."

XIII

'Then the young foot-page will run,
Then my lover will ride faster,
Till he kneeleth at my knee:
"I am a duke's eldest son,
Thousand serfs do call me master,
But, O Love, I love but *thee!*"

XIV

'He will kiss me on the mouth
Then, and lead me as a lover
Through the crowds that praise his deeds;
And, when soul-tied by one troth,
Unto *him* I will discover
That swan's nest among the reeds.'

XV

Little Ellie, with her smile
Not yet ended, rose up gaily,
Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,
And went homeward, round a mile,
Just to see, as she did daily,
What more eggs were with the two.

XVI

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
Where the osier pathway leads,
Past the boughs she stoops — and stops.
Lo, the wild swan had deserted,
And a rat had gnawed the reeds!

XVII

Ellie went home sad and slow.
If she found the lover ever,
With his red-roan steed of steeds,
Sooth I know not; but I know
She could never show him — never,
That swan's nest among the reeds!

LESSONS FROM THE GORSE

'To win the secret of a weed's plain heart.'
— *Lowell.*

First printed in the *Athenæum*, October 23, 1841.

I

Mountain gorses, ever-golden,
Cankered not the whole year long!
Do ye teach us to be strong,
Howsoever pricked and holden
Like your thorny blooms, and so
Trodden on by rain and snow,
Up the hill-side of this life, as bleak as where ye grow?

II

Mountain blossoms, shining blossoms,
Do ye teach us to be glad
When no summer can be had,
Blooming in our inward bosoms?
Ye, whom God preserveth still,
Set as lights upon a hill,
Tokens to the wintry earth that Beauty liveth still!

III

Mountain gorses, do ye teach us
From that academic chair
Canopied with azure air,
That the wisest word man reaches
Is the humblest he can speak?

Ye, who live on mountain peak,
Yet live low along the ground, beside the grasses meek!

IV

Mountain gorses, since Linnæus
Knelt beside you on the sod,
For your beauty thanking God, —
For your teaching, ye should see us
Bowing in prostration new!
Whence arisen, — if one or two
Drops be on our cheeks — O world, they are not tears but dew.

THE DEAD PAN

When publishing this poem, the author accompanied it with the following note: —

'Excited by Schiller's *Götter Griechenlands*, and partly founded on a well-known tradition mentioned in a treatise of Plutarch (*De Oraculorum Defectu*), according to which, at the hour of the Saviour's agony, a cry of "Great Pan is dead!" swept across the waves in the hearing of certain mariners, — and the oracles ceased.

'It is in all veneration to the memory of the deathless Schiller that I oppose a doctrine still more dishonoring to poetry than to Christianity.

'As Mr. Kenyon's graceful and harmonious paraphrase of the German poem was the first occasion of the turning of my thoughts in this direction, I take advantage of the pretence to indulge my feelings (which overflow on other grounds) by inscribing my lyric to that dear friend and relative, with the earnestness of appreciating esteem as well as of affectionate gratitude.'

Many passages in Mrs. Browning's correspondence (see *Notes and Illustrations* at the end of this volume) testify to the importance which she herself attached to 'The Dead Pan,' — a poem which shows her at her best and at her worst, exhibiting in an equally striking manner her besetting faults of style and the virile strength and splendor of her imagination. It seems to have been as a distinct and solemn public profession of Christian faith triumphant over pagan fancy that she insisted on having it stand last in the collection of her poems published in 1844.

I

Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas,
Can ye listen in your silence?
Can your mystic voices tell us
Where ye hide? In floating islands,
With a wind that evermore
Keeps you out of sight of shore?
Pan, Pan is dead.

II

In what revels are ye sunken
In old Æthiopia?
Have the Pygmies made you drunken,
Bathing in mandragora
Your divine pale lips that shiver
Like the lotus in the river?
Pan, Pan is dead.

III

Do ye sit there still in slumber,
In gigantic Alpine rows?
The black poppies out of number
Nodding, dripping from your brows
To the red lees of your wine,
And so kept alive and fine?
Pan, Pan is dead.

IV

Or lie crushed your stagnant corses
Where the silver spheres roll on,
Stung to life by centric forces
Thrown like rays out from the sun? —
While the smoke of your old altars
Is the shroud that round you welters?
Great Pan is dead.

V

'Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas'
Said the old Hellenic tongue, —
Said the hero-oaths, as well as
Poets' songs the sweetest sung:
Have ye grown deaf in a day?
Can ye speak not yea or nay,
Since Pan is dead?

VI

Do ye leave your rivers flowing
All alone, O Naiades,
While your drenchèd locks dry slow in
This cold feeble sun and breeze?
Not a word the Naiads say,
Though the rivers run for aye;
For Pan is dead.

VII

From the gloaming of the oak-wood,
O ye Dryads, could ye flee?
At the rushing thunderstroke, would
No sob tremble through the tree?

Not a word the Dryads say,
Though the forests wave for aye;
For Pan is dead.

VIII

Have ye left the mountain places,
Oreads wild, for other tryst?
Shall we see no sudden faces
Strike a glory through the mist?
Not a sound the silence thrills
Of the everlasting hills:
Pan, Pan is dead.

IX

O twelve gods of Plato's vision,
Crowned to starry wanderings,
With your chariots in procession
And your silver clash of wings!
Very pale ye seem to rise,
Ghosts of Grecian deities,
Now Pan is dead!

X

Jove, that right hand is unloaded
Whence the thunder did prevail,
While in idiocy of godhead
Thou art staring the stars pale!
And thine eagle, blind and old,
Roughs his feathers in the cold.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XI

Where, O Juno, is the glory
Of thy regal look and tread?
Will they lay, for evermore, thee
On thy dim, strait, golden bed?
Will thy queendom all lie hid
Meekly under either lid?
Pan, Pan is dead.

XII

Ha, Apollo! floats his golden
Hair all mist-like where he stands,
While the Muses hang enfolding
Knee and foot with faint wild hands?
'Neath the clanging of thy bow,
Niobe looked lost as thou!
Pan, Pan is dead.

XIII

Shall the casque with its brown iron
Pallas' broad blue eyes eclipse,
And no hero take inspiring
From the god-Greek of her lips?
'Neath her olive dost thou sit,
Mars the mighty, cursing it?
Pan, Pan is dead.

XIV

Bacchus, Bacchus! on the panther
He swoons, bound with his own vines;
And his Mænads slowly saunter,
Head aside, among the pines,
While they murmur dreamingly
'Evohe! — ah — evohe! —
Ah, Pan is dead!'

XV

Neptune lies beside the trident,
Dull and senseless as a stone;
And old Pluto deaf and silent
Is cast out into the sun:
Ceres smileth stern thereat,
'We *all* now are desolate —
Now Pan is dead.'

XVI

Aphrodite! dead and driven
As thy native foam thou art;
With the cestus long done heaving
On the white calm of thine heart!
Ai Adonis! at that shriek
Not a tear runs down her cheek —
Pan, Pan is dead.

XVII

And the Loves, we used to know from
One another, huddled lie,
Frore as taken in a snow-storm,
Close beside her tenderly;
As if each had weakly tried
Once to kiss her as he died.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XVIII

What, and Hermes? Time enthralleth
All thy cunning, Hermes, thus,
And the ivy blindly crawleth
Round thy brave caduceus?
Hast thou no new message for us,
Full of thunder and Jove-glories?
Nay, Pan is dead.

XIX

Crownèd Cybele's great turret
Rocks and crumbles on her head;
Roar the lions of her chariot
Toward the wilderness, unfed:
Scornful children are not mute, —
'Mother, mother, walk afoot,
Since Pan is dead!'

XX

In the fiery-hearted centre
Of the solemn universe,
Ancient Vesta, — who could enter
To consume thee with this curse?
Drop thy gray chin on thy knee,
O thou palsied Mystery!
For Pan is dead.

XXI

Gods, we vainly do adjure you, —
Ye return nor voice nor sign!
Not a votary could secure you
Even a grave for your Divine:
Not a grave, to show thereby
Here these gray old gods do lie.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXII

Even that Greece who took your wages
Calls the obolus outworn;
And the hoarse, deep-throated ages
Laugh your godships unto scorn:
And the poets do disclaim you,
Or grow colder if they name you —
And Pan is dead.

XXIII

Gods bereavèd, gods belated,
With your purples rent asunder!
Gods discrowned and desecrated,
Disinherited of thunder!
Now, the goats may climb and crop
The soft grass on Ida's top —
Now Pan is dead.

XXIV

Calm, of old, the bark went onward,
When a cry more loud than wind
Rose up, deepened, and swept sunward
From the pilèd Dark behind;
And the sun shrank and grew pale,
Breathed against by the great wail —
'Pan, Pan is dead.'

XXV

And the rowers from the benches
Fell, each shuddering on his face,
While departing Influences
Struck a cold back through the place;
And the shadow of the ship
Reeled along the passive deep —
'Pan, Pan is dead.'

XXVI

And that dismal cry rose slowly
And sank slowly through the air,
Full of spirit's melancholy
And eternity's despair!
And they heard the words it said —
PAN IS DEAD — GREAT PAN IS DEAD —
PAN, PAN IS DEAD.

XXVII

'T was the hour when One in Sion
Hung for love's sake on a cross;
When his brow was chill with dying
And his soul was faint with loss;
When his priestly blood dropped downward
And his kingly eyes looked throneward —
Then, Pan was dead.

XXVIII

By the love, He stood alone in,
His sole Godhead rose complete,
And the false gods fell down moaning
Each from off his golden seat;
All the false gods with a cry
Rendered up their deity —
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXIX

Wailing wide across the islands,
They rent, vest-like, their Divine;
And a darkness and a silence
Quenched the light of every shrine;
And Dodona's oak swang lonely
Henceforth, to the tempest only:
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXX

Pythia staggered, feeling o'er her
Her lost god's forsaking look;
Straight her eyeballs filmed with horror
And her crispy fillets shook
And her lips gasped, through their foam,
For a word that did not come.
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXXI

O ye vain false gods of Hellas,
Ye are silent evermore!
And I dash down this old chalice
Whence libations ran of yore.
See, the wine crawls in the dust
Wormlike — as your glories must,
Since Pan is dead.

XXXII

Get to dust, as common mortals,
By a common doom and track!
Let no Schiller from the portals
Of that Hades call you back,
Or instruct us to weep all
At your antique funeral.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXXIII

By your beauty, which confesses
Some chief Beauty conquering you, —
By our grand heroic guesses
Through your falsehood at the True, —
We will weep *not!* earth shall roll
Heir to each god's aureole —
And Pan is dead.

XXXIV

Earth outgrows the mythic fancies
Sung beside her in her youth,
And those debonair romances
Sound but dull beside the truth.
Phœbus' chariot-course is run:
Look up, poets, to the sun!
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXXV

Christ hath sent us down the angels;
And the whole earth and the skies
Are illumed by altar-candles
Lit for blessèd mysteries;
And a Priest's hand through creation
Waveth calm and consecration:
And Pan is dead.

XXXVI

Truth is fair: should we forgo it?
Can we sigh right for a wrong?
God Himself is the best Poet,
And the Real is his song.
Sing his truth out fair and full,
And secure his beautiful!
Let Pan be dead!

XXXVII

Truth is large: our aspiration
Scarce embraces half we be.
Shame, to stand in his creation
And doubt truth's sufficiency! —
To think God's song unexcelling
The poor tales of our own telling —
When Pan is dead!

XXXVIII

What is true and just and honest,
What is lovely, what is pure,
All of praise that hath admonisht,
All of virtue, — shall endure;
These are themes for poets' uses,
Stirring nobler than the Muses,
Ere Pan was dead.

XXXIX

O brave poets, keep back nothing,
Nor mix falsehood with the whole!
Look up Godward; speak the truth in
Worthy song from earnest soul:
Hold, in high poetic duty,
Truest Truth the fairest Beauty!
Pan, Pan is dead.

POEMS OF 1850

In 1850, four years after Miss Barrett's marriage to Robert Browning, a new edition of her poems appeared under the title of *Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in two volumes, London, Chapman and Hall.* This edition retained the dedication to Mr. Moulton-Barrett of the edition of 1844, and contained, beside the contents of the previous volumes, translations of the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus and the *Lament for Adonis* of Bion, — which will be found with other translations at the end of this volume, — and the poems which follow.

The first of these poems, 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point,' was first printed in 1848 in *The Liberty Bell*, the annual publication issued for many years and sold at the National Anti-Slavery Bazaar held in Boston. 'The Runaway Slave' was reprinted the following year as a pamphlet for the author's own use. She says of it in a letter from Pisa to Mr. Boyd, dated December 21, 1846, 'I am just sending off an anti-slavery poem for America, too ferocious, perhaps, for the Americans to publish: but they asked for a poem, and shall have it.'

THE RUNAWAY SLAVE AT PILGRIM'S POINT

I

I STAND on the mark beside the shore
Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
Where exile turned to ancestor,
And God was thanked for liberty.
I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,
I bend my knee down on this mark:
I look on the sky and the sea.

II

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you!
I see you come proud and slow
From the land of the spirits pale as dew
And round me and round me ye go.
O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
All night long from the whips of one
Who in your names works sin and woe!

III

And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where ye knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar;
And lift my black face, my black hand,
Here, in your names, to curse this land
Ye blessed in freedom's, evermore.

IV

I am black, I am black,
And yet God made me, they say:
But if He did so, smiling back
He must have cast his work away
Under the feet of his white creatures,
With a look of scorn, that the dusky features
Might be trodden again to clay.

V

And yet He has made dark things
To be glad and merry as light:
There 's a little dark bird sits and sings,
There 's a dark stream ripples out of sight,
And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,
And the sweetest stars are made to pass
O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI

But *we* who are dark, we are dark!
Ah God, we have no stars!
About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison-bars.
The poor souls crouch so far behind
That never a comfort can they find
By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII

Indeed we live beneath the sky,
That great smooth Hand of God stretched out
On all his children fatherly,
To save them from the dread and doubt
Which would be if, from this low place,
All opened straight up to his face
Into the grand eternity.

VIII

And still God's sunshine and his frost,
They make us hot, they make us cold,
As if we were not black and lost;
And the beasts and birds, in wood and fold,
Do fear and take us for very men:
Could the whip-poor-will or the cat of the glen
Look into my eyes and be bold?

IX

I am black, I am black!
But, once, I laughed in girlish glee,
For one of my color stood in the track
Where the drivers drove, and looked at me,
And tender and full was the look he gave —
Could a slave look *so* at another slave? —
I look at the sky and the sea.

X

And from that hour our spirits grew
As free as if unsold, unbought:
Oh, strong enough, since we were two,
To conquer the world, we thought.
The drivers drove us day by day;
We did not mind, we went one way,
And no better a freedom sought.

XI

In the sunny ground between the canes,
He said 'I love you' as he passed;
When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,
I heard how he vowed it fast:
While others shook he smiled in the hut,
As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut
Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII

I sang his name instead of a song,
  Over and over I sang his name,
Upward and downward I drew it along
  My various notes, — the same, the same!
I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
Might never guess, from aught they could hear,
  It was only a name — a name.

XIII

I look on the sky and the sea.
  We were two to love and two to pray:
Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
  Though nothing didst Thou say!
Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun:
And now I cry who am but one,
  Thou wilt not speak to-day.

XIV

We were black, we were black,
  We had no claim to love and bliss,
What marvel if each went to wrack?
  They wrung my cold hands out of his,
They dragged him — where? I crawled to touch
His blood's mark in the dust . . . not much,
  Ye pilgrim-souls, though plain as *this!*

XV

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong!
  Mere grief 's too good for such as I:
So the white men brought the shame ere long
  To strangle the sob of my agony.
They would not leave me for my dull
Wet eyes! — it was too merciful
  To let me weep pure tears and die.

XVI

I am black, I am black!
  I wore a child upon my breast,
An amulet that hung too slack,
  And, in my unrest, could not rest:
Thus we went moaning, child and mother,
One to another, one to another,
  Until all ended for the best.

XVII

For hark! I will tell you low, low,
  I am black, you see, —
And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
  Was far too white, too white for me;
As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
Beside me at church but yesterday,
  Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

XVIII

My own, own child! I could not bear
  To look in his face, it was so white;
I covered him up with a kerchief there,
  I covered his face in close and tight:
And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,
For the white child wanted his liberty —
  Ha, ha! he wanted the master-right.

XIX

He moaned and beat with his head and feet,
  His little feet that never grew;
He struck them out, as it was meet,
  Against my heart to break it through:
I might have sung and made him mild,
But I dared not sing to the white-faced child
  The only song I knew.

XX

I pulled the kerchief very close:
  He could not see the sun, I swear,
More, then, alive, than now he does
  From between the roots of the mango . . . where?
I know where. Close! A child and mother
Do wrong to look at one another
  When one is black and one is fair.

XXI

Why, in that single glance I had
  Of my child's face, . . . I tell you all,
I saw a look that made me mad!
  The *master's* look, that used to fall
On my soul like his lash . . . or worse!
And so, to save it from my curse,
  I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII

And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
  He shivered from head to foot;
Till after a time, he lay instead
  Too suddenly still and mute.
I felt, beside, a stiffening cold:
I dared to lift up just a fold,
  As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII

But *my* fruit . . . ha, ha ! — there, had been
(I laugh to think on 't at this hour !)
Your fine white angels (who have seen
Nearest the secret of God's power)
And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of mine
As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

XXIV

Ha, ha, the trick of the angels white !
They freed the white child's spirit so.
I said not a word, but day and night
I carried the body to and fro,
And it lay on my heart like a stone, as chill.
— The sun may shine out as much as he will:
I am cold, though it happened a month ago.

XXV

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,
I carried the little body on;
The forest's arms did round us shut,
And silence through the trees did run:
They asked no question as I went,
They stood too high for astonishment,
They could see God sit on his throne.

XXVI

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
I bore it on through the forest, on;
And when I felt it was tired at last,
I scooped a hole beneath the moon:
Through the forest-tops the angels far,
With a white sharp finger from every star,
Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII

Yet when it was all done aright, —
Earth, 'twixt me and my baby, strewed, —
All, changed to black earth, — nothing white, —
A dark child in the dark ! — ensued
Some comfort, and my heart grew young;
I sate down smiling there and sung
The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII

And thus we two were reconciled,
The white child and black mother, thus:
For as I sang it soft and wild,
The same song, more melodious,
Rose from the grave whereon I sate:
It was the dead child singing that,
To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX

I look on the sea and the sky.
Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored lay
The free sun rideth gloriously,
But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away
Through the earliest streaks of the morn :
My face is black, but it glares with a scorn
Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX

Ha ! — in their stead, their hunter sons !
Ha, ha ! they are on me — they hunt in a ring !
Keep off ! I brave you all at once,
I throw off your eyes like snakes that sting !
You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think:
Did you ever stand still in your triumph, and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded wing ?

XXXI

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift ! —)
I wish you who stand there five abreast,
Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,
A little corpse as safely at rest
As mine in the mangoes ! Yes, but *she*
May keep live babies on her knee,
And sing the song she likes the best.

XXXII

I am not mad: I am black.
I see you staring in my face —
I know you staring, shrinking back,
Ye are born of the Washington-race,
And this land is the free America,
And this mark on my wrist — (I prove what I say)
Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

XXXIII

You think I shrieked then ? Not a sound
I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun;
I only cursed them all around
As softly as I might have done

My very own child: from these sands
Up to the mountains, lift your hands,
  O slaves, and end what I begun!

XXXIV

Whips, curses; these must answer those!
  For in this UNION you have set
Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
  Each loathing each; and all forget
The seven wounds in Christ's body fair,
While HE sees gaping everywhere
  Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV

Our wounds are different. Your white men
  Are, after all, not gods indeed,
Nor able to make Christs again
  Do good with bleeding. *We* who bleed
(Stand off!) we help not in our loss!
We are too heavy for our cross,
  And fall and crush you and your seed.

XXXVI

I fall, I swoon! I look at the sky.
  The clouds are breaking on my brain;
I am floated along, as if I should die
  Of liberty's exquisite pain.
In the name of the white child waiting for me
In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,
White men, I leave you all curse-free
  In my broken heart's disdain!

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine* for October, 1846. The colossal design in flowering annuals here described was one of the adornments of the garden at Hope End.

I

NINE years old! The first of any
  Seem the happiest years that come:
  Yet when *I* was nine, I said
  No such word! I thought instead
That the Greeks had used as many
  In besieging Ilium.

II

Nine green years had scarcely brought me
  To my childhood's haunted spring;
  I had life, like flowers and bees,
  In betwixt the country trees,
And the sun the pleasure taught me
  Which he teacheth every thing.

III

If the rain fell, there was sorrow:
  Little head leant on the pane,
  Little finger drawing down it
  The long trailing drops upon it,
And the 'Rain, rain, come to-morrow,'
  Said for charm against the rain.

IV

Such a charm was right Canidian,
  Though you meet it with a jeer!
  If I said it long enough,
  Then the rain hummed dimly off,
And the thrush with his pure Lydian
  Was left only to the ear;

V

And the sun and I together
  Went a-rushing out of doors:
  We our tender spirits drew
  Over hill and dale in view,
Glimmering hither, glimmering thither
  In the footsteps of the showers.

VI

Underneath the chestnuts dripping,
  Through the grasses wet and fair,
  Straight I sought my garden-ground
  With the laurel on the mound,
And the pear-tree oversweeping
  A side-shadow of green air.

VII

In the garden lay supinely
  A huge giant wrought of spade!
  Arms and legs were stretched at length
  In a passive giant strength, —
The fine meadow turf, cut finely,
  Round them laid and interlaid.

VIII

Call him Hector, son of Priam!
  Such his title and degree.
  With my rake I smoothed his brow,
  Both his cheeks I weeded through,
But a rhymer such as I am,
  Scarce can sing his dignity.

IX

Eyes of gentianellas azure,
  Staring, winking at the skies:

Nose of gillyflowers and box;
Scented grasses put for locks,
Which a little breeze at pleasure
Set a-waving round his eyes:

X

Brazen helm of daffodillies,
With a glitter toward the light;
Purple violets for the mouth,
Breathing perfumes west and south;
And a sword of flashing lilies,
Holden ready for the fight:

XI

And a breastplate made of daisies,
Closely fitting, leaf on leaf;
Periwinkles interlaced
Drawn for belt about the waist;
While the brown bees, humming praises,
Shot their arrows round the chief.

XII

And who knows (I sometimes wondered)
If the disembodied soul
Of old Hector, once of Troy,
Might not take a dreary joy
Here to enter — if it thundered,
Rolling up the thunder-roll?

XIII

Rolling this way from Troy-ruin,
In this body rude and rife
Just to enter, and take rest
'Neath the daisies of the breast —
They, with tender roots, renewing
His heroic heart to life?

XIV

Who could know? I sometimes started
At a motion or a sound!
Did his mouth speak — naming Troy
With an ὀτοτοτοτοῖ?
Did the pulse of the Strong-hearted
Make the daisies tremble round?

XV

It was hard to answer, often:
But the birds sang in the tree,
But the little birds sang bold
In the pear-tree green and old,
And my terror seemed to soften
Through the courage of their glee

XVI

Oh, the birds, the tree, the ruddy
And white blossoms sleek with rain!
Oh, my garden rich with pansies!
Oh, my childhood's bright romances!
All revive, like Hector's body,
And I see them stir again.

XVII

And despite life's changes, chances,
And despite the deathbell's toll,
They press on me in full seeming
Help, some angel! stay this dreaming!
As the birds sang in the branches,
Sing God's patience through my soul!

XVIII

That no dreamer, no neglecter
Of the present's work unsped,
I may wake up and be doing,
Life's heroic ends pursuing,
Though my past is dead as Hector,
And though Hector is twice dead.

SONNETS

FLUSH OR FAUNUS

You see this dog; it was but yesterday
I mused forgetful of his presence here,
Till thought on thought drew downward tear on tear:
When from the pillow where wet-cheeked I lay,
A head as hairy as Faunus thrust its way
Right sudden against my face, two golden-clear
Great eyes astonished mine, a drooping ear
Did flap me on either cheek to dry the spray!
I started first as some Arcadian
Amazed by goatly god in twilight grove:
But as the bearded vision closelier ran
My tears off, I knew Flush, and rose above
Surprise and sadness, — thanking the true Pan
Who by low creatures leads to heights of love.

FINITE AND INFINITE

The wind sounds only in opposing straits,
The sea, beside the shore; man's spirit rends
Its quiet only up against the ends
Of wants and oppositions, loves and hates,
Where, worked and worn by passionate debates,
And losing by the loss it apprehends,
The flesh rocks round and every breath it sends
Is ravelled to a sigh. All tortured states
Suppose a straitened place. Jehovah Lord,
Make room for rest, around me! out of sight
Now float me of the vexing land abhorred,
Till in deep calms of space my soul may right
Her nature, shoot large sail on lengthening cord,
And rush exultant on the Infinite.

TWO SKETCHES

There can be no violation of privacy now in identifying the originals of these two sketches as the beloved sisters of the poetess, Henrietta and Arabella Moulton-Barrett. These sonnets appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* during the summer of 1847.

I

H. B.

The shadow of her face upon the wall
May take your memory to the perfect Greek,
But when you front her, you would call the cheek
Too full, sir, for your models, if withal
That bloom it wears could leave you critical,
And that smile reaching toward the rosy streak;
For one who smiles so has no need to speak
To lead your thoughts along, as steed to stall.
A smile that turns the sunny side o' the heart
On all the world, as if herself did win
By what she lavished on an open mart!
Let no man call the liberal sweetness, sin, —
For friends may whisper as they stand apart,
'Methinks there 's still some warmer place within.'

II

A. B.

Her azure eyes, dark lashes hold in fee;
Her fair superfluous ringlets without check
Drop after one another down her neck,
As many to each cheek as you might see
Green leaves to a wild rose; this sign outwardly,
And a like woman-covering seems to deck
Her inner nature, for she will not fleck
World's sunshine with a finger. Sympathy
Must call her in Love's name! and then, I know,
She rises up, and brightens as she should,
And lights her smile for comfort, and is slow
In nothing of high-hearted fortitude.
To smell this flower, come near it! such can grow
In that sole garden where Christ's brow dropped blood.

MOUNTAINEER AND POET

The simple goatherd between Alp and sky,
Seeing his shadow, in that awful tryst,
Dilated to a giant's on the mist,
Esteems not his own stature larger by
The apparent image, but more patiently
Strikes his staff down beneath his clenching fist,
While the snow-mountains lift their amethyst
And sapphire crowns of splendor, far and nigh,
Into the air around him. Learn from hence
Meek morals, all ye poets that pursue
Your way still onward up to eminence!
Ye are not great because creation drew
Large revelations round your earliest sense,
Nor bright because God's glory shines for you.

THE POET

The poet hath the child's sight in his breast
And sees all *new*. What oftenest he has viewed
He views with the first glory. Fair and good
Pall never on him, at the fairest, best,
But stand before him holy and undressed
In week-day false conventions, such as would
Drag other men down from the altitude
Of primal types, too early dispossessed.
Why, God would tire of all his heavens, as soon
As thou, O godlike, childlike poet, didst
Of daily and nightly sights of sun and moon!
And therefore hath He set thee in the midst
Where men may hear thy wonder's ceaseless tune
And praise his world for ever, as thou bidst.

HIRAM POWERS' 'GREEK SLAVE'

The American sculptor Hiram Powers and his family were among the few intimate friends of the Brownings during their first years in Florence.

They say Ideal beauty cannot enter
The house of anguish. On the threshold stands
An alien Image with enshackled hands,
Called the Greek Slave! as if the artist meant her
(That passionless perfection which he lent her,
Shadowed not darkened where the sill expands)
To so confront man's crimes in different lands
With man's ideal sense. Pierce to the centre,
Art's fiery finger, and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world. Appeal, fair stone,
From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!
Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
East griefs but west, and strike and shame the strong,
By thunders of white silence, overthrown.

LIFE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, May, 1847.

Each creature holds an insular point in space;
Yet what man stirs a finger, breathes a sound,
But all the multitudinous beings round
In all the countless worlds with time and place
For their conditions, down to the central base,
Thrill, haply, in vibration and rebound,
Life answering life across the vast profound,
In full antiphony, by a common grace?
I think this sudden joyance which illumes
A child's mouth sleeping, unaware may run
From some soul newly loosened from earth's tombs:
I think this passionate sigh, which half-begun
I stifle back, may reach and stir the plumes
Of God's calm angel standing in the sun.

* LOVE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, May, 1847.

We cannot live, except thus mutually
We alternate, aware or unaware,
The reflex act of life: and when we bear
Our virtue outward most impulsively,
Most full of invocation, and to be
Most instantly compellant, certes there
We live most life, whoever breathes most air
And counts his dying years by sun and sea.
But when a soul, by choice and conscience, doth
Throw out her full force on another soul,
The conscience and the concentration both
Make mere life, Love. For Life in perfect whole
And aim consummated, is Love in sooth,
As Nature's magnet-heat rounds pole with pole.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

'And there was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour.'

First printed in *Blackwood*, May, 1847.

God, who with thunders and great voices kept
Beneath thy throne, and stars most silver-paced
Along the inferior gyres, and open-faced
Melodious angels round, canst intercept
Music with music, — yet, at will, has swept
All back, all back (said he in Patmos placed,)
To fill the heavens with silence of the waste
Which lasted half an hour! Lo, I who have wept
All day and night, beseech Thee by my tears,
And by that dread response of curse and groan
Men alternate across these hemispheres,
Vouchsafe us such a half-hour's hush alone,
In compensation for our stormy years:
As heaven has paused from song, let earth from moan!

THE PROSPECT

First printed in *Blackwood* with the two preceding.

Methinks we do as fretful children do,
Leaning their faces on the window-pane
To sigh the glass dim with their own breath's stain,
And shut the sky and landscape from their view:
And thus, alas, since God the maker drew
A mystic separation 'twixt those twain, —
The life beyond us, and our souls in pain, —
We miss the prospect which we are called unto
By grief we are fools to use. Be still and strong,
O man, my brother! Hold thy sobbing breath,
And keep thy soul's large window pure from wrong!
That so, as life's appointment issueth,
Thy vision may be clear to watch along
The sunset consummation-lights of death.

HUGH STUART BOYD

HIS BLINDNESS

To whom was inscribed, in grateful affection, my poem of 'Cyprus Wine.' There comes a moment in life when even gratitude and affection turn to pain, as they do now with me. This excellent and learned man, enthusiastic for the good and the beautiful, and one of the most simple and upright of human beings, passed out of his long darkness through death in the summer of 1848; Dr. Adam Clarke's daughter and biographer, Mrs. Smith (happier in this than the absent), fulfilling a doubly filial duty as she sat by the deathbed of her father's friend and hers. — E. B. B.

God would not let the spheric lights accost
This God-loved man, and bade the earth stand off
With all her beckoning hills whose golden stuff
Under the feet of the royal sun is crossed.
Yet such things were to him not wholly lost, —
Permitted, with his wandering eyes light-proof,
To catch fair visions rendered full enough
By many a ministrant accomplished ghost, —
Still seeing, to sounds of softly-turned book-leaves,
Sappho's crown-rose, and Meleager's Spring,
And Gregory's starlight on Greek-burnished eves:
Till Sensuous and Unsensuous seemed one thing,
Viewed from one level, — earth's reapers at the sheaves
Scarce plainer than Heaven's angels on the wing.

HUGH STUART BOYD

HIS DEATH, 1848

Belovèd friend, who living many years
With sightless eyes raised vainly to the sun,
Didst learn to keep thy patient soul in tune
To visible nature's elemental cheers:

God has not caught thee to new hemispheres
Because thou wast aweary of this one; —
I think thine angel's patience first was done,
And that he spake out with celestial tears,
'Is it enough, dear God? then lighten so
This soul that smiles in darkness!'
Steadfast friend,
Who never didst my heart or life misknow,
Nor either's faults too keenly apprehend, —
How can I wonder when I see thee go
To join the Dead found faithful to the end?

HUGH STUART BOYD

LEGACIES

Three gifts the Dying left me, — Æschylus,
And Gregory Nazianzen, and a clock
Chiming the gradual hours out like a flock
Of stars whose motion is melodious.
The books were those I used to read from, thus
Assisting my dear teacher's soul to unlock
The darkness of his eyes; now, mine they mock,
Blinded in turn by tears; now, murmurous
Sad echoes of my young voice, years agone
Intoning from these leaves the Grecian phrase,
Return and choke my utterance. Books, lie down
In silence on the shelf there, within gaze;
And thou, clock, striking the hour's pulses on,
Chime in the day which ends these parting-days!

CONFESSIONS

I

Face to face in my chamber, my silent chamber, I saw her:
God and she and I only, there I sat down to draw her
Soul through the clefts of confession: 'Speak, I am holding thee fast,
As the angel of resurrection shall do at the last!'
'My cup is blood-red
With my sin,' she said,
'And I pour it out to the bitter lees,
As if the angels of judgment stood over me strong at the last,
Or as thou wert as these.'

II

When God smote his hands together, and struck out thy soul as a spark
Into the organized glory of things, from deeps of the dark, —
Say, didst thou shine, didst thou burn, didst thou honor the power in the form,
As the star does at night, or the fire-fly, or even the little ground-worm?
'I have sinned,' she said,
'For my seed-light shed
Has smouldered away from his first decrees.
The cypress praiseth the fire-fly, the ground-leaf praiseth the worm;
I am viler than these.'

III

When God on that sin had pity, and did not trample thee straight
With his wild rains beating and drenching thy light found inadequate;
When He only sent thee the north-wind, a little searching and chill,
To quicken thy flame — didst thou kindle and flash to the heights of his will?
'I have sinned,' she said,
'Unquickened, unspread,
My fire dropt down, and I wept on my knees:
I only said of his winds of the north as I shrank from their chill,
What delight is in these?'

IV

When God on that sin had pity, and did not meet it as such,
But tempered the wind to thy uses, and softened the world to thy touch,
At least thou wast moved in thy soul, though unable to prove it afar,
Thou couldst carry thy light like a jewel, not giving it out like a star?
'I have sinned,' she said,
'And not merited

The gift He gives, by the grace He sees !
The mine-cave praiseth the jewel, the hillside praiseth the star;
I am viler than these.'

V

Then I cried aloud in my passion, — Unthankful and impotent creature,
To throw up thy scorn unto God through the rents in thy beggarly nature !
If He, the all-giving and loving, is served so unduly, what then
Hast thou done to the weak and the false and the changing, — thy fellows of men ?
'I have *loved*,' she said,
(Words bowing her head
As the wind the wet acacia-trees)
'I saw God sitting above me, but I . . . I sat among men,
And I have loved these.'

VI

Again with a lifted voice, like a choral trumpet that takes
The lowest note of a viol that trembles, and triumphing breaks
On the air with it solemn and clear, — 'Behold ! I have sinned not in this !
Where I loved, I have loved much and well, — I have verily loved not amiss.
Let the living,' she said,
'Inquire of the dead,
In the house of the pale-fronted images.
My own true dead will answer for me, that I have not loved amiss
In my love for all these.

VII

'The least touch of their hands in the morning, I keep it by day and by night;
Their least step on the stair, at the door, still throbs through me, if ever so light;
Their least gift, which they left to my childhood, far off in the long-ago years,
Is now turned from a toy to a relic, and seen through the crystals of tears.
Dig the snow,' she said,
'For my churchyard bed,
Yet I, as I sleep, shall not fear to freeze,
If one only of these my beloveds shall love me with heart-warm tears,
As I have loved these !

VIII

'If I angered any among them, from thenceforth my own life was sore;
If I fell by chance from their presence, I clung to their memory more:
Their tender I often felt holy, their bitter I sometimes called sweet;
And whenever their heart has refused me, I fell down straight at their feet.
I have loved,' she said, —
'Man is weak, God is dread,
Yet the weak man dies with his spirit at ease,
Having poured such an unguent of love but once on the Saviour's feet
As I lavished for these.'

IX

Go, I cried, thou hast chosen the Human, and left the Divine !
Then, at least, have the Human shared with thee their wild-berry wine ?
Have they loved back thy love, and when strangers approached thee with blame,
Have they covered thy fault with their kisses, and loved thee the same ?
But she shrunk and said
'God, over my head,
Must sweep in the wrath of his judgment-seas,
If *He* shall deal with me sinning, but only indeed the same
And no gentler than these.'

A SABBATH MORNING AT SEA

First printed in *The Amaranth*, 1839, as 'A Sabbath on the Sea.'

I

THE ship went on with solemn face;
To meet the darkness on the deep,
The solemn ship went onward:
I bowed down weary in the place,
For parting tears and present sleep
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

II

Thick sleep which shut all dreams from me,
And kept my inner self apart
And quiet from emotion,
Then brake away and left me free,
Made conscious of a human heart
Betwixt the heaven and ocean.

III

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!
The waters round me, turbulent,
The skies impassive o'er me,
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,
Half glorified by that intent
Of holding the day-glory!

IV

Two pale thin clouds did stand upon
The meeting line of sea and sky,
With aspect still and mystic:
I think they did foresee the sun,
And rested on their prophecy
In quietude majestic,

V

Then flushed to radiance where they stood,
Like statues by the open tomb
Of shining saints half risen.
The sun! — he came up to be viewed,
And sky and sea made mighty room
To inaugurate the vision.

VI

I oft had seen the dawnlight run
As red wine through the hills, and break
Through many a mist's inurning;
But, here, no earth profaned the sun:
Heaven, ocean, did alone partake
The sacrament of morning.

VII

Away with thoughts fantastical!
I would be humble to my worth,
Self-guarded as self-doubted:
Though here no earthly shadows fall,
I, joying, grieving without earth,
May desecrate without it.

VIII

God's sabbath morning sweeps the waves;
I would not praise the pageant high
Yet miss the dedicature:
I, carried toward the sunless graves
By force of natural things, — should I
Exult in only Nature?

IX

And could I bear to sit alone
'Mid Nature's fixed benignities,
While my warm pulse was moving?
Too dark thou art, O glittering sun,
Too strait ye are, capacious seas,
To satisfy the loving!

X

It seems a better lot than so,
To sit with friends beneath the beech,
And feel them dear and dearer;
Or follow children as they go
In pretty pairs, with softened speech,
As the church-bells ring nearer.

XI

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day!
The sea sings round me while ye roll
Afar the hymn unaltered,
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,
And bless me deeper in the soul,
Because the voice has faltered.

XII

And though this sabbath comes to me
Without the stolèd minister
Or chanting congregation,
God's Spirit brings communion, HE
Who brooded soft on waters drear,
Creator on creation.

XIII

Himself, I think, shall draw me higher
Where keep the saints with harp and song
An endless sabbath morning,
And on that sea commixed with fire
Oft drop their eyelids, raised too long
To the full Godhead's burning.

THE MASK

I

I HAVE a smiling face, she said,
I have a jest for all I meet,
I have a garland for my head
And all its flowers are sweet, —
And so you call me gay, she said.

II

Grief taught to me this smile, she said,
And Wrong did teach this jesting bold;
These flowers were plucked from garden-bed

While a death-chime was tolled:
And what now will you say? — she said.

III

Behind no prison-grate, she said,
Which slurs the sunshine half a mile,
Live captives so uncomforted
As souls behind a smile.
God's pity let us pray, she said.

IV

I know my face is bright, she said, —
Such brightness dying suns diffuse:
I bear upon my forehead shed
The sign of what I lose,
The ending of my day, she said.

V

If I dared leave this smile, she said,
And take a moan upon my mouth,
And tie a cypress round my head,
And let my tears run smooth,
It were the happier way, she said.

VI

And since that must not be, she said,
I fain your bitter world would leave.
How calmly, calmly smile the Dead,
Who do not, therefore, grieve!
The yea of Heaven is yea, she said.

VII

But in your bitter world, she said,
Face-joy 's a costly mask to wear;
'T is bought with pangs long nourishèd,
And rounded to despair:
Grief's earnest makes life's play, she said.

VIII

Ye weep for those who weep? she said —
Ah fools! I bid you pass them by.
Go, weep for those whose hearts have bled
What time their eyes were dry.
Whom sadder can I say? she said.

CALLS ON THE HEART

I

Free Heart, that singest to-day
Like a bird on the first green spray,
Wilt thou go forth to the world
Where the hawk hath his wing unfurled
To follow, perhaps, thy way?
Where the tamer thine own will bind,
And, to make thee sing, will blind,
While the little hip grows for the free behind?
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Free hearts are better so.'

II

The world, thou hast heard it told,
Has counted its robber-gold,
And the pieces stick to the hand;
The world goes riding it fair and grand,
While the truth is bought and sold;
World-voices east, world-voices west,
They call thee, Heart, from thine early rest,
'Come hither, come hither and be our guest.'
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Good hearts are calmer so.'

III

Who calleth thee, Heart? World's Strife,
With a golden heft to his knife;
World's Mirth, with a finger fine
That draws on a board in wine
Her blood-red plans of life;
World's Gain, with a brow knit down;
World's Fame, with a laurel crown
Which rustles most as the leaves turn brown:
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Calm hearts are wiser so.'

IV

Hast heard that Proserpina
(Once fooling) was snatched away
To partake the dark king's seat,
And the tears ran fast on her feet
To think how the sun shone yesterday?
With her ankles sunken in asphodel
She wept for the roses of earth which fell
From her lap when the wild car drave to hell.
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Wise hearts are warmer so.'

V

And what is this place not seen,
Where Hearts may hide serene?
''T is a fair still house well-kept
Which humble thoughts have swept
And holy prayers made clean.
There I sit with Love in the sun,
And we two never have done
Singing sweeter songs than are guessed by *one.*'
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Warm hearts are fuller so.'

VI

O Heart, O Love, — I fear
That Love may be kept too near.
Hast heard, O Heart, that tale,
How Love may be false and frail
To a Heart once holden dear?
— 'But this true Love of mine
Clings fast as the clinging vine,
And mingles pure as the grapes in wine.'
Heart, wilt thou go?
— 'No, no!
Full hearts beat higher so.'

VII

O Heart, O Love, beware!
Look up, and boast not there,
For who has twirled at the pin?
'T is the World, between Death and Sin, —
The World and the World's Despair!
And Death has quickened his pace
To the hearth, with a mocking face,
Familiar as Love, in Love's own place.
Heart, wilt thou go?
'Still, no!
High hearts must grieve even so.'

VIII

The house is waste to-day,
The leaf has dropt from the spray,
The thorn, prickt through to the song:
If summer doeth no wrong,
The winter will, they say.
Sing, Heart! What heart replies?
In vain we were calm and wise,
If the tears unkissed stand on in our eyes.
Heart, wilt thou go?
—'Ah, no!
Grieved hearts must break even so.'

IX

Howbeit all is not lost.
The warm noon ends in frost,
And worldly tongues of promise
Like sheep-bells die off from us
On the desert hills cloud-crossed:
Yet through the silence shall
Pierce the death-angel's call,
And 'Come up hither,' recover all.
Heart, wilt thou go?
—'I go!
Broken hearts triumph so.'

WISDOM UNAPPLIED

I

If I were thou, O butterfly,
And poised my purple wing to spy
The sweetest flowers that live and die,

II

I would not waste my strength on those,
As thou, — for summer has a close,
And pansies bloom not in the snows.

III

If I were thou, O working bee,
And all that honey-gold I see
Could delve from roses easily,

IV

I would not hive it at man's door,
As thou, — that heirdom of my store
Should make him rich and leave me poor.

V

If I were thou, O eagle proud,
And screamed the thunder back aloud,
And faced the lightning from the cloud,

VI

I would not build my eyrie-throne,
As thou, — upon a crumbling stone
Which the next storm may trample down.

VII

If I were thou, O gallant steed,
With pawing hoof and dancing head,
And eye outrunning thine own speed,

VIII

I would not meeken to the rein,
As thou, — nor smooth my nostril plain
From the glad desert's snort and strain.

IX

If I were thou, red-breasted bird,
With song at shut-up window heard,
Like Love's sweet Yes too long deferred,

X

I would not overstay delight,
As thou, — but take a swallow-flight
Till the new spring returned to sight.

XI

While yet I spake, a touch was laid
Upon my brow, whose pride did fade
As thus, methought, an angel said, —

XII

'If I were *thou* who sing'st this song,
Most wise for others, and most strong
In seeing right while doing wrong,

XIII

'I would not waste my cares, and choose,
As *thou*, — to seek what thou must lose,
Such gains as perish in the use.

XIV

'I would not work where none can win,
As *thou*, — halfway 'twixt grief and sin,
But look above and judge within.

XV

'I would not let my pulse beat high,
As *thou*, — towards fame's regality,
Nor yet in love's great jeopardy.

XVI

'I would not champ the hard cold bit,
As *thou*, — of what the world thinks fit,
But take God's freedom, using it.

XVII

'I would not play earth's winter out,
As *thou*, — but gird my soul about,
And live for life past death and doubt.

XVIII

'Then sing, O singer! — but allow,
Beast, fly and bird, called foolish now,
Are wise (for all thy scorn) as thou.'

HUMAN LIFE'S MYSTERY

I

We sow the glebe, we reap the corn,
  We build the house where we may rest,
And then, at moments, suddenly
We look up to the great wide sky,
Inquiring wherefore we were born,
  For earnest or for jest?

II

The senses folding thick and dark
  About the stifled soul within,
We guess diviner things beyond,
And yearn to them with yearning fond;
We strike out blindly to a mark
  Believed in, but not seen.

III

We vibrate to the pant and thrill
  Wherewith Eternity has curled
In serpent-twine about God's seat:
While, freshening upward to his feet,
In gradual growth his full-leaved will
  Expands from world to world.

IV

And, in the tumult and excess
  Of act and passion under sun,
We sometimes hear — oh, soft and far,
As silver star did touch with star,
The kiss of Peace and Righteousness
  Through all things that are done.

V

God keeps his holy mysteries
  Just on the outside of man's dream;
In diapason slow, we think
To hear their pinions rise and sink,
While they float pure beneath his eyes,
  Like swans adown a stream.

VI

Abstractions, are they, from the forms
  Of his great beauty? — exaltations
From his great glory? — strong previsions
Of what we shall be? — intuitions
Of what we are — in calms and storms
  Beyond our peace and passions?

VII

Things nameless! which, in passing so,
  Do stroke us with a subtle grace;
We say, 'Who passes?' — they are dumb;

We cannot see them go or come,
Their touches fall soft, cold, as snow
Upon a blind man's face.

VIII

Yet, touching so, they draw above
Our common thoughts to Heaven's unknown;
Our daily joy and pain advance
To a divine significance
Our human love — O mortal love,
That light is not its own!

IX

And sometimes horror chills our blood
To be so near such mystic Things,
And we wrap round us for defence
Our purple manners, moods of sense —
As angels from the face of God
Stand hidden in their wings.

X

And sometimes through life's heavy swound
We grope for them, with strangled breath
We stretch our hands abroad and try
To reach them in our agony;
And widen, so, the broad life-wound
Soon large enough for death.

A CHILD'S THOUGHT OF GOD

I

They say that God lives very high;
But if you look above the pines
You cannot see our God; and why?

II

And if you dig down in the mines
You never see Him in the gold;
Though from Him all that 's glory shines.

III

God is so good, He wears a fold
Of heaven and earth across his face —
Like secrets kept, for love, untold.

IV

But still I feel that his embrace
Slides down by thrills, through all things made,
Through sight and sound of every place:

V

As if my tender mother laid
On my shut lips her kisses' pressure,
Half-waking me at night, and said
'Who kissed you through the dark, dear guesser?'

THE CLAIM

First printed in the *Athenæum*, September 17, 1842, as 'A Claim on Allegory.'

I

Grief sate upon a rock and sighed one day,
(Sighing is all her rest,)
'Wellaway, wellaway, ah wellaway!'
As ocean beat the stone, did she her breast,
'Ah wellaway! ah me! alas, ah me!'
Such sighing uttered she.

II

A Cloud spake out of heaven, as soft as rain
That falls on water, — 'Lo
The winds have wandered from me! I remain
Alone in the sky-waste, and cannot go
To lean my whiteness on the mountain blue
Till wanted for more dew.

III

'The sun has struck my brain to weary peace,
Whereby constrained and pale
I spin for him a larger golden fleece
Than Jason's, yearning for as full a sail.
Sweet Grief, when thou hast sighèd to thy mind,
Give me a sigh for wind,

IV

'And let it carry me adown the west!'
But Love, who prôstrated
Lay at Grief's foot, his lifted eyes possessed
Of her full image, answered in her stead;
'Now nay, now nay! she shall not give away
What is my wealth, for any Cloud that flieth:

Where Grief makes moan,
Love claims his own,
And therefore do I lie here night and day,
And eke my life out with the breath she sigheth.'

A DEAD ROSE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846.

I

O Rose, who dares to name thee?
No longer roseate now, nor soft nor sweet,
But pale and hard and dry as stubble wheat, —
Kept seven years in a drawer, thy titles shame thee.

II

The breeze that used to blow thee
Between the hedgerow thorns, and take away
An odor up the lane to last all day, —
If breathing now, unsweetened would forgo thee.

III

The sun that used to smite thee,
And mix his glory in thy gorgeous urn
Till beam appeared to bloom, and flower to burn, —
If shining now, with not a hue would light thee.

IV

The dew that used to wet thee,
And, white first, grow incarnadined because
It lay upon thee where the crimson was, —
If dropping now, would darken where it met thee.

V

The fly that 'lit upon thee
To stretch the tendrils of its tiny feet
Along thy leaf's pure edges after heat, —
If 'lighting now, would coldly overrun thee.

VI

The bee that once did suck thee,
And build thy perfumed ambers up his hive,
And swoon in thee for joy, till scarce alive, —
If passing now, would blindly overlook thee.

VII

The heart doth recognize thee,
Alone, alone! the heart doth smell thee sweet,
Doth view thee fair, doth judge thee most complete,
Perceiving all those changes that disguise thee.

VIII

Yes, and the heart doth owe thee
More love, dead rose, than to any roses bold
Which Julia wears at dances, smiling cold: —
Lie still upon this heart which breaks below thee!

A WOMAN'S SHORTCOMINGS

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846.

I

She has laughed as softly as if she sighed,
She has counted six, and over,
Of a purse well filled and a heart well tried —
Oh, each a worthy lover!
They 'give her time;' for her soul must slip
Where the world has set the grooving;
She will lie to none with her fair red lip:
But love seeks truer loving.

II

She trembles her fan in a sweetness dumb,
As her thoughts were beyond recalling,
With a glance for *one*, and a glance for *some*,
From her eyelids rising and falling;
Speaks common words with a blushful air,
Hears bold words, unreproving;
But her silence says — what she never will swear —
And love seeks better loving.

III

Go, lady, lean to the night-guitar
And drop a smile to the bringer;
Then smile as sweetly, when he is far,
At the voice of an in-door singer.
Bask tenderly beneath tender eyes;
Glance lightly, on their removing;
And join new vows to old perjuries —
But dare not call it loving.

IV

Unless you can think, when the song is done,
No other is soft in the rhythm;
Unless you can feel, when left by One,
That all men else go with him;
Unless you can know, when unpraised by his breath,
That your beauty itself wants proving;
Unless you can swear 'For life, for death!' —
Oh, fear to call it loving!

V

Unless you can muse in a crowd all day
On the absent face that fixed you;
Unless you can love, as the angels may,
With the breadth of heaven betwixt you;
Unless you can dream that his faith is fast,
Through behoving and unbehoving;
Unless you can *die* when the dream is past —
Oh, never call it loving!

A MAN'S REQUIREMENTS

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846.

I

Love me, Sweet, with all thou art,
Feeling, thinking, seeing;
Love me in the lightest part,
Love me in full being.

II

Love me with thine open youth
In its frank surrender;
With the vowing of thy mouth.
With its silence tender.

III

Love me with thine azure eyes,
Made for earnest granting;
Taking color from the skies,
Can Heaven's truth be wanting?

IV

Love me with their lids, that fall
Snow-like at first meeting;
Love me with thine heart, that all
Neighbors then see beating.

V

Love me with thine hand stretched out
Freely — open-minded:
Love me with thy loitering foot, —
Hearing one behind it.

VI

Love me with thy voice, that turns
Sudden faint above me;
Love me with thy blush that burns
When I murmur *Love me!*

VII

Love me with thy thinking soul,
Break it to love-sighing;
Love me with thy thoughts that roll
On through living — dying.

VIII

Love me in thy gorgeous airs,
When the world has crowned thee;
Love me, kneeling at thy prayers,
With the angels round thee.

IX

Love me pure, as musers do,
Up the woodlands shady:
Love me gaily, fast and true,
As a winsome lady.

X

Through all hopes that keep us brave
Farther off or nigher,
Love me for the house and grave,
And for something higher.

XI

Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,
Woman's love no fable,
I will love *thee* — half a year —
As a man is able.

A YEAR'S SPINNING

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846, as 'Maude's Spinning.'

I

He listened at the porch that day,
To hear the wheel go on, and on;
And then it stopped, ran back away,
While through the door he brought the sun:
But now my spinning is all done.

II

He sat beside me, with an oath
That love ne'er ended, once begun;
I smiled — believing for us both,
What was the truth for only one:
And now my spinning is all done.

III

My mother cursed me that I heard
A young man's wooing as I spun:
Thanks, cruel mother, for that word, —
For I have, since, a harder known!
And now my spinning is all done.

IV

I thought — O God! — my first-born's cry
Both voices to mine ear would drown:
I listened in mine agony —
It was the *silence* made me groan!
And now my spinning is all done.

V

Bury me 'twixt my mother's grave,
(Who cursed me on her death-bed lone)
And my dead baby's (God it save!)
Who, not to bless me, would not moan.
And now my spinning is all done.

VI

A stone upon my heart and head,
But no name written on the stone!
Sweet neighbors, whisper low instead,
'This sinner was a loving one —
And now her spinning is all done.'

VII

And let the door ajar remain,
In case he should pass by anon;
And leave the wheel out very plain, —
That HE, when passing in the sun,
May see the spinning is all done.

CHANGE UPON CHANGE

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846.

I

Five months ago the stream did flow,
The lilies bloomed within the sedge,
And we were lingering to and fro,
Where none will track thee in this snow,
Along the stream, beside the hedge.
Ah, Sweet, be free to love and go!
For if I do not hear thy foot,
The frozen river is as mute,
The flowers have dried down to the root:
And why, since these be changed since May,
Shouldst *thou* change less than *they*?

II

And slow, slow as the winter snow
The tears have drifted to mine eyes;
And my poor cheeks, five months ago
Set blushing at thy praises so,
Put paleness on for a disguise.
Ah, Sweet, be free to praise and go!
For if my face is turned too pale,
It was thine oath that first did fail, —
It was thy love proved false and frail, —
And why, since these be changed enow,
Should *I* change less than *thou*?

A REED

First printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1846.

I

I am no trumpet, but a reed;
No flattering breath shall from me lead
A silver sound, a hollow sound:
I will not ring, for priest or king,
One blast that in re-echoing
Would leave a bondsman faster bound

II

I am no trumpet, but a reed, —
A broken reed, the wind indeed
Left flat upon a dismal shore;
Yet if a little maid or child
Should sigh within it, earnest-mild
This reed will answer evermore.

III

I am no trumpet, but a reed;
Go, tell the fishers, as they spread
Their nets along the river's edge,
I will not tear their nets at all,
Nor pierce their hands, if they should fall.
Then let them leave me in the sedge.

A CHILD'S GRAVE AT FLORENCE

A. A. E. C.

BORN JULY, 1848. DIED NOVEMBER, 1849

First printed in the *Athenæum*, December 22, 1849. Alice Augusta Elizabeth was the daughter of Count and Countess Cottrell. The mother, to whom there are many affectionate allusions in Mrs. Browning's letters, was born Sophia Augusta Tulk, the daughter of an English clergyman. The father, Henry Cottrell, a young English artist, was member of the household of the last Duke of Lucca, and received his title from him.

Of English blood, of Tuscan birth,
What country should we give her?
Instead of any on the earth,
The civic Heavens receive her.

And here among the English tombs
In Tuscan ground we lay her,
While the blue Tuscan sky endomes
Our English words of prayer.

A little child! — how long she lived,
By months, not years, is reckoned:
Born in one July, she survived
Alone to see a second.

Bright-featured, as the July sun
Her little face still played in,
And splendors, with her birth begun,
Had had no time for fading.

So, Lily, from those July hours,
No wonder we should call her;
She looked such kinship to the flowers, —
Was but a little taller.

A Tuscan Lily, — only white,
As Dante, in abhorrence
Of red corruption, wished aright
The lilies of his Florence.

We could not wish her whiter, — her
Who perfumed with pure blossom
The house — a lovely thing to wear
Upon a mother's bosom!

This July creature thought perhaps
Our speech not worth assuming;
She sat upon her parents' laps
And mimicked the gnat's humming;

Said 'father,' 'mother' — then left off,
For tongues celestial, fitter:
Her hair had grown just long enough
To catch heaven's jasper-glitter.

Babes! Love could always hear and see
Behind the cloud that hid them.
'Let little children come to Me,
And do not thou forbid them.'

So, unforbidding, have we met,
And gently here have laid her,
Though winter is no time to get
The flowers that should o'erspread her:

We should bring pansies quick with spring,
Rose, violet, daffodilly,
And also, above everything,
White lilies for our Lily.

Nay, more than flowers, this grave exacts,—
Glad, grateful attestations
Of her sweet eyes and pretty acts,
With calm renunciations.

Her very mother with light feet
Should leave the place too earthy,
Saying 'The angels have thee, Sweet,
Because we are not worthy.'

But winter kills the orange-buds,
The gardens in the frost are,
And all the heart dissolves in floods,
Remembering we have lost her.

Poor earth, poor heart, — too weak, too weak
To miss the July shining!
Poor heart! — what bitter words we speak
When God speaks of resigning!

Sustain this heart in us that faints,
Thou God, the self-existent!
We catch up wild at parting saints
And feel thy heaven too distant.

The wind that swept them out of sin
  Has ruffled all our vesture:
On the shut door that let them in
  We beat with frantic gesture, —

To us, us also, open straight!
  The outer life is chilly;
Are *we* too, like the earth, to wait
  Till next year for our Lily?

— Oh, my own baby on my knees,
  My leaping, dimpled treasure,
At every word I write like these,
  Clasped close with stronger pressure!

Too well my own heart understands, —
  At every word beats fuller —
My little feet, my little hands,
  And hair of Lily's color!

But God gives patience, Love learns strength,
  And Faith remembers promise,
And Hope itself can smile at length
  On other hopes gone from us.

Love, strong as Death, shall conquer Death,
  Through struggle made more glorious:
This mother stills her sobbing breath,
  Renouncing yet victorious.

Arms, empty of her child, she lifts
  With spirit unbereaven, —
'God will not all take back his gifts;
  My Lily 's mine in heaven.

'Still mine! maternal rights serene
  Not given to another!
The crystal bars shine faint between
  The souls of child and mother.

'Meanwhile,' the mother cries, 'content!
  Our love was well divided:
Its sweetness following where she went,
  Its anguish stayed where I did.

'Well done of God, to halve the lot,
  And give her all the sweetness;
To us, the empty room and cot, —
  To her, the Heaven's completeness.

'To us, this grave, — to her, the rows
  The mystic palm-trees spring in;
To us, the silence in the house, —
  To her, the choral singing.

'For her, to gladden in God's view, —
  For us, to hope and bear on.
Grow, Lily, in thy garden new,
  Beside the Rose of Sharon!

'Grow fast in heaven, sweet Lily clipped,
  In love more calm than this is,
And may the angels dewy-lipped
  Remind thee of our kisses!

'While none shall tell thee of our tears,
  These human tears now falling,
Till, after a few patient years,
  One home shall take us all in.

'Child, father, mother — who, left out?
  Not mother, and not father!
And when, our dying couch about,
  The natural mists shall gather,

'Some smiling angel close shall stand
  In old Correggio's fashion,
And bear a LILY in his hand,
  For death's ANNUNCIATION.'

LIFE AND LOVE

I

FAST this Life of mine was dying,
  Blind already and calm as death,
Snowflakes on her bosom lying
  Scarcely heaving with her breath.

II

Love came by, and having known her
  In a dream of fabled lands,
Gently stooped, and laid upon her
  Mystic chrism of holy hands;

III

Drew his smile across her folded
  Eyelids, as the swallow dips;
Breathed as finely as the cold did
  Through the locking of her lips.

IV

So, when Life looked upward, being
  Warmed and breathed on from above,
What sight could she have for seeing,
  Evermore . . . but only LOVE?

A DENIAL

I

We have met late — it is too late to meet,
O friend, not more than friend!
Death's forecome shroud is tangled round my feet,
And if I step or stir, I touch the end.
In this last jeopardy
Can I approach thee, I, who cannot move?
How shall I answer thy request for love?
Look in my face and see.

II

I love thee not, I dare not love thee! go
In silence; drop my hand.
If thou seek roses, seek them where they blow
In garden-alleys, not in desert-sand.
Can life and death agree,
That thou shouldst stoop thy song to my complaint?
I cannot love thee. If the word is faint,
Look in my face and see.

III

I might have loved thee in some former days.
Oh, then, my spirits had leapt
As now they sink, at hearing thy love-praise!
Before these faded cheeks were overwept,
Had this been asked of me,
To love thee with my whole strong heart and head, —
I should have said still . . . yes, but *smiled* and said,
'Look in my face and see!'

IV

But now . . . God sees me, God, who took my heart
And drowned it in life's surge.
In all your wide warm earth I have no part —
A light song overcomes me like a dirge.
Could Love's great harmony
The saints keep step to when their bonds are loose,
Not weigh me down? am *I* a wife to choose?
Look in my face and see —

V

While I behold, as plain as one who dreams,
Some woman of full worth,
Whose voice, as cadenced as a silver stream's,
Shall prove the fountain-soul which sends it forth;
One younger, more thought-free
And fair and gay, than I, thou must forget,
With brighter eyes than these . . . which are not wet . . .
Look in my face and see!

VI

So farewell thou, whom I have known too late
To let thee come so near.
Be counted happy while men call thee great,
And one belovèd woman feels thee dear! —
Not I! — that cannot be.
I am lost, I am changed, — I must go farther, where
The change shall take me worse, and no one dare
Look in my face and see.

VII

Meantime I bless thee. By these thoughts of mine
I bless thee from all such!
I bless thy lamp to oil, thy cup to wine,
Thy hearth to joy, thy hand to an equal touch
Of loyal troth. For me,
I love thee not, I love thee not! — away!
Here 's no more courage in my soul to say
'Look in my face and see.'

PROOF AND DISPROOF

I

Dost thou love me, my Belovèd?
Who shall answer yes or no?
What is provèd or disprovèd
When my soul inquireth so,
Dost thou love me, my Belovèd?

II

I have seen thy heart to-day,
Never open to the crowd,
While to love me aye and aye

Was the vow as it was vowed
By thine eyes of steadfast gray.

III

Now I sit alone, alone —
And the hot tears break and burn,
Now, Belovèd, thou art gone,
Doubt and terror have their turn.
Is it love that I have known?

IV

I have known some bitter things, —
Anguish, anger, solitude.
Year by year an evil brings,
Year by year denies a good;
March winds violate my springs.

V

I have known how sickness bends,
I have known how sorrow breaks, —
How quick hopes have sudden ends,
How the heart thinks till it aches
Of the smile of buried friends.

VI

Last, I have known *thee*, my brave
Noble thinker, lover, doer!
The best knowledge last I have.
But thou comest as the thrower
Of fresh flowers upon a grave.

VII

Count what feelings used to move me!
Can this love assort with those?
Thou, who art so far above me,
Wilt thou stoop so, for repose?
Is it true that thou canst love me?

VIII

Do not blame me if I doubt thee.
I can call love by its name
When thine arm is wrapt about me;
But even love seems not the same,
When I sit alone, without thee.

IX

In thy clear eyes I descried
Many a proof of love, to-day;
But to-night, those unbelied
Speechful eyes being gone away,
There 's the proof to seek, beside.

X

Dost thou love me, my Belovèd?
Only *thou* canst answer yes!
And, thou gone, the proof 's disprovèd,
And the cry rings answerless —
Dost thou love me, my Belovèd?

QUESTION AND ANSWER

I

Love you seek for, presupposes
Summer heat and sunny glow.
Tell me, do you find moss-roses
Budding, blooming in the snow?
Snow might kill the rose-tree's root —
Shake it quickly from your foot,
Lest it harm you as you go.

II

From the ivy where it dapples
A gray ruin, stone by stone,
Do you look for grapes or apples,
Or for sad green leaves alone?
Pluck the leaves off, two or three —
Keep them for morality
When you shall be safe and gone.

INCLUSIONS

I

Oh, wilt thou have my hand, Dear, to lie along in thine?
As a little stone in a running stream, it seems to lie and pine.
Now drop the poor pale hand, Dear, unfit to plight with thine.

II

Oh, wilt thou have my cheek, Dear, drawn closer to thine own?
My cheek is white, my cheek is worn, by many a tear run down.
Now leave a little space, Dear, lest it should wet thine own.

III

Oh, must thou have my soul, Dear, commingled with thy soul? —
Red grows the cheek, and warm the hand; the part is in the whole:
Nor hands nor cheeks keep separate, when soul is joined to soul.

INSUFFICIENCY

I

THERE is no one beside thee and no one above thee,
Thou standest alone as the nightingale sings!
And my words that would praise thee are impotent things,
For none can express thee though all should approve thee.
I love thee so, Dear, that I only can love thee.

II

Say, what can I do for thee? weary thee, grieve thee?
Lean on thy shoulder, new burdens to add?
Weep my tears over thee, making thee sad?
Oh, hold me not — love me not! let me retrieve thee.
I love thee so, Dear, that I only can leave thee.

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

It was while they were living in Pisa, soon after their marriage, that Mrs. Browning first showed her husband that unique sheaf of love-poems, first published in 1850 under the title of *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Long after his wife's death Robert Browning described the scene to Mr. Edmund Gosse, who relates the tale in his *Critical Kit-Kats*, page 2.

'Their custom was, Mr. Browning said, to write alone, and not to show each other what they had written. This was a rule which he sometimes broke through, but she never. He had the habit of working in a downstairs room, where their meals were spread, while Mrs. Browning studied in a room on the floor above. One day, early in 1847, their breakfast being over, Mrs. Browning went upstairs, while her husband stood at the window watching the street till the table should be cleared. He was presently aware of some one behind him, although the servant was gone. It was Mrs. Browning, who held him by the shoulder to prevent his turning to look at her, and at the same time pushed a packet of papers into the pocket of his coat. She told him to read that, and to tear it up if he did not like it; and then she fled again to her own room.'

It was Robert Browning who overruled his wife's strong initial objection to making public these beautiful, but singularly intimate poems; and the fact furnishes an argument to those who believe that he, at least, would not have disliked the publication of the Love Letters. 'I dared not,' he once said, 'reserve to myself the finest Sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare.' Mrs. Browning's reluctance once overcome, her first fancy was to call the collection *Sonnets translated from the Bosnian* (though why from one rather than another of the innumerable Slavic dialects, it would be difficult to guess). But they connected themselves in the husband's mind with another poem for which he had a very special admiration, *Caterina to Camoëns;* and he decreed that they should be called *Sonnets from the Portuguese.* A small edition was first printed for private circulation, under the supervision of Miss Mitford, in a slender volume entitled *Sonnets* by *E. B. B.*, with the imprint Reading, 1847, and marked *Not for Publication;* but three years later the Sonnets were included in the new edition of Mrs. Browning's complete works.

SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

I

I THOUGHT once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair:

And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, —
'Guess now who holds thee?' — 'Death,' I said. But, there,
The silver answer rang, — 'Not Death, but Love.'

II

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said, — Himself, beside
Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied
One of us . . . *that* was God, . . . and laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee, — that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay' is worse
From God than from all others, O my friend!
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
Of chief musician. What hast *thou* to do
With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
The chrism is on thine head, — on mine, the dew, —
And Death must dig the level where these agree.

IV

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems! where
The dancers will break footing, from the care
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor
For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear
To let thy music drop here unaware
In folds of golden fulness at my door?
Look up and see the casement broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in the roof!
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation! there 's a voice within
That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone, aloof.

V

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen grayness. If thy foot in scorn
Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
It might be well perhaps. But if instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
The gray dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off then! go.

VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore —
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine

Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

VII

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear
Because thy name moves right in what they say.

VIII

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of the wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?
Not so; not cold, — but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run
The colors from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther! let it serve to trample on.

IX

Can it be right to give what I can give?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right! We are not peers,
So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas!
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
Nor give thee any love — which were unjust.
Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.

X

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptation. Fire is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax; an equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed:
And love is fire. And when I say at need
I love thee . . . mark! . . . *I love thee* — in thy sight
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays that proceed
Out of my face toward thine. There 's nothing low
In love, when love the lowest: meanest creatures
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
And what I *feel*, across the inferior features
Of what I *am*, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.

XI

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart, —
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music, — why advert
To these things? O Belovèd, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating grace,

To live on still in love, and yet in vain, —
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

XII

Indeed this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast to brow,
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost, —
This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,
I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,
And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak
Of love even, as a good thing of my own:
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne, —
And that I love (O soul, we must be meek !)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

XIII

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on each ? —
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself — me — that I should bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief, —
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.

XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
'I love her for her smile — her look — her way
Of speaking gently, — for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day' —
For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may
Be changed, or change for thee, — and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry, —
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby !
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

XV

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline;
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine,
And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee — on thee —
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory;
As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

XVI

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
Too close against thine heart henceforth to know
How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low !
And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword

To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,
Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

XVII

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between his After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general roar
Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's will devotes
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?
A hope, to sing by gladly? or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?
A shade, in which to sing — of palm or pine?
A grave, on which to rest from singing? Choose.

XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length and say
'Take it.' My day of youth went yesterday;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more: it only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justified, —
Take it thou, — finding pure, from all those years,
The kiss my mother left here when she died.

XIX

The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,
And from my poet's forehead to my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies, —
As purply black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purpureal tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, . . .
The bay-crown's shade, Belovèd, I surmise,
Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black!
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,
I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.

XX

Beloved, my Belovèd, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand, — why, thus I drink
Of life's great cup of wonder! Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech, — nor ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as dull,
Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.

XXI

Say over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated
Should seem 'a cuckoo-song,' as thou dost treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.
Belovèd, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain

Cry, 'Speak once more — thou lovest!' Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me — toll
The silver iterance! — only minding, Dear,
To love me also in silence with thy soul.

XXII

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curvèd point, — what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
Be here contented? Think. In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Belovèd, — where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

XXIII

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine?
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine
Because of grave-damps falling round my head?
I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine —
But . . . *so* much to thee? Can I pour thy wine
While my hands tremble? Then my soul, instead
Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.
Then, love me, Love! look on me — breathe on me!
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
For love, to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee!

XXIV

Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life —
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer,
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

XXV

A heavy heart, Belovèd, have I borne
From year to year until I saw thy face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the place
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn
By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace
Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace
Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn
My heavy heart. Then *thou* didst bid me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.

XXVI

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.

But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come — to be,
Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendors (better, yet the same,
As river-water hallowed into fonts),
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

XXVII

MY own Belovèd, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,
And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss! My own, my own,
Who camest to me when the world was gone,
And I who looked for only God, found *thee!*
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
As one who stands in dewless asphodel
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life, — so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between the good and bad,
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.

XXVIII

MY letters! all dead paper, mute and white!
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee to-night.
This said, — he wished to have me in his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,
Yet I wept for it! — this, . . . the paper 's light . . .
Said, *Dear, I love thee;* and I sank and quailed
As if God's future thundered on my past.
This said, *I am thine* — and so its ink has paled
With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

XXIX

I THINK of thee! — my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there 's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down, — burst, shattered, everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee — I am too near thee.

XXX

I SEE thine image through my tears to-night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
Refer the cause? — Belovèd, is it thou
Or I, who makes me sad? The acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow,
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's Amen.
Belovèd, dost thou love? or did I see all
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,

For my soul's eyes? Will that light come again,
As now these tears come — falling hot and real?

XXXI

Thou comest! all is said without a word.
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through
Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue
The sin most, but the occasion — that we two
Should for a moment stand unministered
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,
Thou dovelike help! and, when my fears would rise,
With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,
Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

XXXII

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath
To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe;
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such man's love! — more like an out-of-tune
Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
A wrong on *thee*. For perfect strains may float
'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced, —
And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat.

XXXIII

Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,
From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,
To glance up in some face that proved me dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God — call God! — So let thy mouth
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name, — and I, in truth,
With the same heart, will answer and not wait.

XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I 'll answer thee
As those, when thou shalt call me by my name —
Lo, the vain promise! is the same, the same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy?
When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,
To run and answer with the smile that came
At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. When I answer now,
I drop a grave thought, break from solitude;
Yet still my heart goes to thee — ponder how —
Not as to a single good, but all my good!
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as this blood.

XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is

Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?
That 's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
Yet love me — wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

XXXVI

When we met first and loved, I did not build
Upon the event with marble. Could it mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown serene
And strong since then, I think that God has willed
A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .
Lest these enclaspèd hands should never hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.
And Love, be false! if *he*, to keep one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

XXXVII

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make,
Of all that strong divineness which I know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.
It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovranty, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake
Thy purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit:
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;
And ever since, it grew more clean and white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with its 'Oh, list,'
When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed in height
The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down
In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,
I have been proud and said, 'My love, my own.'

XXXIX

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
To look through and behind this mask of me
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's race, —
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens, — because nor sin nor woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighborhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed, —
Nothing repels thee, . . Dearest, teach me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!

XL

Oh, yes! they love through all this world of ours!
I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the flowers
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth, — and not so much
Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
A lover, my Belovèd! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry 'Too late.'

XLI

I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
Who paused a little near the prison-wall
To hear my music in its louder parts
Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's
Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot
To hearken what I said between my tears, . . .
Instruct me how to thank thee! Oh, to shoot
My soul's full meaning into future years,
That *they* should lend it utterance, and salute
Love that endures, from Life that disappears!

XLII

This sonnet was not in the privately printed collection of 1847, which were forty-three in all; but was first inserted when the sonnets were included among Mrs. Browning's other poems in 1856.

'*My future will not copy fair my past*' —
I wrote that once; and thinking at my side
My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look upcast
To the white throne of God, I turned at last,
And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
To angels in thy soul! Then I, long tried
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff
Gave out green leaves with morning dews impearled.
I seek no copy now of life's first half:
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, unhoped for in the world!

XLIII

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, — I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

XLIV

Belovèd, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew

From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here 's eglantine,
Here 's ivy! — take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colors true,
And tell thy soul their roots are left in mine.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

Mr. and Mrs. Browning, who had passed the first winter of their married life at Pisa, moved on to Florence in May, 1847. They occupied for the first two or three months of their residence there an apartment in the Via delle Belle Donne, near the Duomo; but on their return to Florence, after a short visit to Vallombrosa at midsummer, they installed themselves in the palace on the Via Maggio, which has ever since been associated with their names; where the Italians have placed a tablet to Mrs. Browning's memory and which is now the property of Mr. Robert Barrett Browning. Mrs. Browning's first letter from 'Palazzo Guidi' is dated May 7, 1847. The windows of the apartment, which comprised six rooms on the *piano nobile*, overlooked the then Piazza del Gran Duca; now the Piazza Pitti, — which was the actual theatre of many of the most picturesque events and striking demonstrations connected with the abortive Italian revolution of 1848. The first part of the poem was written in that heroic year; the second, nearly three years later, in 1851, — the year of its first publication by Chapman & Hall. Mrs. Browning is careful to explain in her preface to this first edition, that she has attempted 'no continuous narrative, nor exposition of political philosophy,' but merely 'a simple story of personal impressions whose only value is in the intensity with which they were received, as proving her warm attachment for a beautiful and unfortunate country.' She further apologizes for the discrepancy in tone between the two parts of the poem, which, she says, cannot be as painful to the reader as it is to the writer herself: though she thinks it should be accepted as a guaranty of her sincerity. Indeed Part II. shows a great, and much too great, revulsion of feeling from the facile sympathy and buoyant enthusiasm of Part I. Neither the optimism of 1848, nor the pessimism of 1851, was fully justified by facts; but in either case, the writer's point of view was more that of an artist than a politician; of a spectator at the play, than of an earnest partisan. Her whole-souled adoption of the cause of Italian independence, and passionate identification with it, date from a later period, after she had lived longer in Italy, and had begun to know Italians. The defeat of the patriots at Novara in 1849, which crushed the hopes of Italy for the time being, and was attended by peculiarly tragical circumstances, is barely mentioned in Mrs. Browning's letters. The premature peace of Villafranca, ten years later, almost broke her heart, and certainly shortened her days.

CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

A POEM, IN TWO PARTS

PART I

I HEARD last night a little child go singing
'Neath Casa Guidi windows, by the church,
O bella libertà, O bella! — stringing
The same words still on notes he went in search
So high for, you concluded the upspringing
Of such a nimble bird to sky from perch
Must leave the whole bush in a tremble-green,
And that the heart of Italy must beat,
While such a voice had leave to rise serene
'Twixt church and palace of a Florence street:
A little child, too, who not long had been
By mother's finger steadied on his feet,
And still *O bella libertà* he sang.

Then I thought, musing, of the innumerous
Sweet songs which still for Italy outrang
From older singers' lips who sang not thus

Exultingly and purely, yet, with pang
Fast sheathed in music, touched the heart of us
So finely that the pity scarcely pained.
I thought how Filicaja led on others,
Bewailers for their Italy enchained,
And how they called her childless among mothers,
Widow of empires, ay, and scarce refrained
Cursing her beauty to her face, as brothers
Might a shamed sister's, — 'Had she been less fair
She were less wretched;' — how, evoking so
From congregated wrong and heaped despair
Of men and women writhing under blow,
Harrowed and hideous in a filthy lair,
Some personating Image wherein woe
Was wrapt in beauty from offending much,
They called it Cybele, or Niobe,
Or laid it corpse-like on a bier for such,
Where all the world might drop for Italy
Those cadenced tears which burn not where they touch, —
'Juliet of nations, canst thou die as we?
And was the violet crown that crowned thy head
So over-large, though new buds made it rough,
It slipped down and across thine eyelids dead,
O sweet, fair Juliet?' Of such songs enough,
Too many of such complaints! behold, instead,
Void at Verona, Juliet's marble trough:
As void as that is, are all images
Men set between themselves and actual wrong,
To catch the weight of pity, meet the stress
Of conscience, — since 't is easier to gaze long
On mournful masks and sad effigies
Than on real, live, weak creatures crushed by strong.

For me who stand in Italy to-day
Where worthier poets stood and sang before,
I kiss their footsteps yet their words gainsay.
I can but muse in hope upon this shore
Of golden Arno as it shoots away
Through Florence' heart beneath her bridges four:
Bent bridges, seeming to strain off like bows
And tremble while the arrowy undertide
Shoots on and cleaves the marble as it goes,
And strikes up palace-walls on either side,
And froths the cornice out in glittering rows,
With doors and windows quaintly multiplied,
And terrace-sweeps, and gazers upon all,
By whom if flower or kerchief were thrown out
From any lattice there, the same would fall
Into the river underneath, no doubt,
It runs so close and fast 'twixt wall and wall.
How beautiful! the mountains from without
In silence listen for the word said next.
What word will men say, — here where Giotto planted
His campanile like an unperplexed
Fine question Heavenward, touching the things granted
A noble people who, being greatly vexed
In act, in aspiration keep undaunted?
What word will God say? Michael's Night and Day
And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble scorn
Like dogs upon a dunghill, couched on clay,
From whence the Medicean stamp's outworn,
The final putting off of all such sway
By all such hands, and freeing of the unborn
In Florence and the great world outside Florence.
Three hundred years his patient statues wait
In that small chapel of the dim Saint Lawrence:
Day's eyes are breaking bold and passionate
Over his shoulder, and will flash abhorrence

On darkness and with level looks meet fate,
When once loose from that marble film of theirs;
The Night has wild dreams in her sleep, the Dawn
Is haggard as the sleepless, Twilight wears
A sort of horror; as the veil withdrawn
'Twixt the artist's soul and works had left them heirs
Of speechless thoughts which would not quail nor fawn,
Of angers and contempts, of hope and love:
For not without a meaning did he place
The princely Urbino on the seat above
With everlasting shadow on his face,
While the slow dawns and twilights disapprove
The ashes of his long-extinguished race
Which never more shall clog the feet of men.
I do believe, divinest Angelo,
That winter-hour in Via Larga, when
They bade thee build a statue up in snow
And straight that marvel of thine art again
Dissolved beneath the sun's Italian glow,
Thine eyes, dilated with the plastic passion,
Thawing too in drops of wounded manhood, since,
To mock alike thine art and indignation,
Laughed at the palace-window the new prince, —
('Aha! this genius needs for exaltation,
When all 's said and howe'er the proud may wince,
A little marble from our princely mines!')
I do believe that hour thou laughedst too
For the whole sad world and for thy Florentines,
After those few tears, which were only few!
That as, beneath the sun, the grand white lines
Of thy snow-statue trembled and withdrew, —
The head, erect as Jove's, being palsied first,
The eyelids flattened, the full brow turned blank,
The right-hand, raised but now as if it cursed,
Dropt, a mere snowball, (till the people sank
Their voices, though a louder laughter burst
From the royal window) — thou couldst proudly thank
God and the prince for promise and presage,
And laugh the laugh back, I think verily,
Thine eyes being purged by tears of righteous rage
To read a wrong into a prophecy,
And measure a true great man's heritage
Against a mere great-duke's posterity.
I think thy soul said then, 'I do not need
A princedom and its quarries, after all;
For if I write, paint, carve a word, indeed,
On book or board or dust, on floor or wall,
The same is kept of God who taketh heed
That not a letter of the meaning fall
Or ere it touch and teach his world's deep heart,
Outlasting, therefore, all your lordships, sir!
So keep your stone, beseech you, for your part,
To cover up your grave-place and refer
The proper titles; *I* live by my art.
The thought I threw into this snow shall stir
This gazing people when their gaze is done;
And the tradition of your act and mine,
When all the snow is melted in the sun,
Shall gather up, for unborn men, a sign
Of what is the true princedom, — ay, and none
Shall laugh that day, except the drunk with wine.'

Amen, great Angelo! the day 's at hand.
If many laugh not on it, shall we weep?
Much more we must not, let us understand.
Through rhymers sonneteering in their sleep,
And archaists mumbling dry bones up the land,
And sketchers lauding ruined towns a-heap, —

Through all that drowsy hum of voices smooth,
The hopeful bird mounts carolling from brake,
The hopeful child, with leaps to catch his growth,
Sings open-eyed for liberty's sweet sake:
And I, a singer also from my youth,
Prefer to sing with these who are awake,
With birds, with babes, with men who will not fear
The baptism of the holy morning dew,
(And many of such wakers now are here,
Complete in their anointed manhood, who
Will greatly dare and greatlier persevere)
Than join those old thin voices with my new,
And sigh for Italy with some safe sigh
Cooped up in music 'twixt an oh and ah, —
Nay, hand in hand with that young child, will I
Go singing rather, '*Bella libertà*,'
Than, with those poets, croon the dead or cry
'*Se tu men bella fossi, Italia!*'

'Less wretched if less fair.' Perhaps a truth
Is so far plain in this, that Italy,
Long trammelled with the purple of her youth
Against her age's ripe activity,
Sits still upon her tombs, without death's ruth
But also without life's brave energy.
'Now tell us what is Italy?' men ask:
And others answer, 'Virgil, Cicero,
Catullus, Cæsar.' What beside? to task
The memory closer — 'Why, Boccaccio,
Dante, Petrarca,' — and if still the flask
Appears to yield its wine by drops too slow, —
'Angelo, Raffael, Pergolese,' — all
Whose strong hearts beat through stone, or charged again
The paints with fire of souls electrical,
Or broke up heaven for music. What more then?
Why, then, no more. The chaplet's last beads fall
In naming the last saintship within ken,
And, after that, none prayeth in the land.
Alas, this Italy has too long swept
Heroic ashes up for hour-glass sand;
Of her own past, impassioned nympholept!
Consenting to be nailed here by the hand
To the very bay-tree under which she stept
A queen of old, and plucked a leafy branch;
And, licensing the world too long indeed
To use her broad phylacteries to stanch
And stop her bloody lips, she takes no heed
How one clear word would draw an avalanche
Of living sons around her, to succeed
The vanished generations. Can she count
These oil-eaters with large live mobile mouths
Agape for macaroni, in the amount
Of consecrated heroes of her south's
Bright rosary? The pitcher at the fount,
The gift of gods, being broken, she much loathes
To let the ground-leaves of the place confer
A natural bowl. So henceforth she would seem
No nation, but the poet's pensioner,
With alms from every land of song and dream,
While aye her pipers sadly pipe of her
Until their proper breaths, in that extreme
Of sighing, split the reed on which they played:
Of which, no more. But never say 'no more'
To Italy's life! Her memories undismayed
Still argue 'evermore;' her graves implore
Her future to be strong and not afraid;
Her very statues send their looks before.

We do not serve the dead — the past is past.
God lives, and lifts his glorious mornings up
Before the eyes of men awake at last,
Who put away the meats they used to sup,
And down upon the dust of earth outcast
The dregs remaining of the ancient cup,
Then turn to wakeful prayer and worthy act.
The Dead, upon their awful 'vantage ground,

The sun not in their faces, shall abstract
No more our strength; we will not be discrowned
As guardians of their crowns, nor deign transact
A barter of the present, for a sound
Of good so counted in the foregone days.
O Dead, ye shall no longer cling to us
With rigid hands of dessicating praise,
And drag us backward by the garment thus,
To stand and laud you in long-drawn virelays!
We will not henceforth be oblivious
Of our own lives, because ye lived before,
Nor of our acts, because ye acted well.
We thank you that ye first unlatched the door,
But will not make it inaccessible
By thankings on the threshold any more.
We hurry onward to extinguish hell
With our fresh souls, our younger hope, and God's
Maturity of purpose. Soon shall we
Die also! and, that then our periods
Of life may round themselves to memory
As smoothly as on our graves the burial-sods,
We now must look to it to excel as ye,
And bear our age as far, unlimited
By the last mind-mark; so, to be invoked
By future generations, as their Dead.

'T is true that when the dust of death has choked
A great man's voice, the common words he said
Turn oracles, the common thoughts he yoked
Like horses, draw like griffins: this is true
And acceptable. I, too, should desire,
When men make record, with the flowers they strew,
'Savonarola's soul went out in fire
Upon our Grand-duke's piazza, and burned through
A moment first, or ere he did expire,
The veil betwixt the right and wrong, and showed
How near God sat and judged the judges there,' —
Upon the self-same pavement over-strewed
To cast my violets with as reverent care,
And prove that all the winters which have snowed
Cannot snow out the scent from stones and air
Of a sincere man's virtues. This was he,
Savonarola, who, while Peter sank
With his whole boat-load, called courageously
'Wake Christ, wake Christ!' — who, having tried the tank
Of old church-waters used for baptistry
Ere Luther came to spill them, swore they stank;
Who also by a princely deathbed cried,
'Loose Florence, or God will not loose thy soul!'

Then fell back the Magnificent and died
Beneath the star-look shooting from the cowl,
Which turned to wormwood-bitterness the wide
Deep sea of his ambitions. It were foul
To grudge Savonarola and the rest
Their violets: rather pay them quick and fresh!
The emphasis of death makes manifest
The eloquence of action in our flesh;
And men who, living, were but dimly guessed,
When once free from their life's entangled mesh,
Show their full length in graves, or oft indeed
Exaggerate their stature, in the flat,
To noble admirations which exceed
Most nobly, yet will calculate in that
But accurately. We, who are the seed
Of buried creatures, if we turned and spat
Upon our antecedents, we were vile.
Bring violets rather. If these had not walked
Their furlong, could we hope to walk our mile?
Therefore bring violets. Yet if we self-baulked
Stand still, a-strewing violets all the while,
These moved in vain, of whom we have vainly talked.
So rise up henceforth with a cheerful smile,
And having strewn the violets, reap the corn,

And having reaped and garnered, bring the plough
And draw new furrows 'neath the healthy morn,
And plant the great Hereafter in this Now.

Of old 't was so. How step by step was worn,
As each man gained on each securely! — how
Each by his own strength sought his own Ideal, —
The ultimate Perfection leaning bright
From out the sun and stars to bless the leal
And earnest search of all for Fair and Right
Through doubtful forms by earth accounted real!
Because old Jubal blew into delight
The souls of men with clear-piped melodies,
If youthful Asaph were content at most
To draw from Jubal's grave, with listening eyes,
Traditionary music's floating ghost
Into the grass-grown silence, were it wise?
And was 't not wiser, Jubal's breath being lost,
That Miriam clashed her cymbals to surprise
The sun between her white arms flung apart,
With new glad golden sounds? that David's strings
O'erflowed his hand with music from his heart?
So harmony grows full from many springs,
And happy accident turns holy art.

You enter, in your Florence wanderings,
The church of Saint Maria Novella. Pass
The left stair, where at plague-time Machiavel
Saw One with set fair face as in a glass,
Dressed out against the fear of death and hell,
Rustling her silks in pauses of the mass,
To keep the thought off how her husband fell,
When she left home, stark dead across her feet, —
The stair leads up to what the Orgagnas save
Of Dante's dæmons: you, in passing it,
Ascend the right stair from the farther nave
To muse in a small chapel scarcely lit
By Cimabue's Virgin. Bright and brave,
That picture was accounted, mark, of old:
A king stood bare before its sovran grace,
A reverent people shouted to behold
The picture, not the king, and even the place
Containing such a miracle grew bold,
Named the Glad Borgo from that beauteous face
Which thrilled the artist, after work, to think
His own ideal Mary-smile should stand
So very near him, — he, within the brink
Of all that glory, let in by his hand
With too divine a rashness! Yet none shrink
Who come to gaze here now; albeit 't was planned
Sublimely in the thought's simplicity:
The Lady, throned in empyreal state,
Minds only the young Babe upon her knee,
While sidelong angels bear the royal weight,
Prostrated meekly, smiling tenderly
Oblivion of their wings; the Child thereat
Stretching its hand like God. If any should,
Because of some stiff draperies and loose joints,
Gaze scorn down from the heights of Raffaelhood
On Cimabue's picture, — Heaven anoints
The head of no such critic, and his blood
The poet's curse strikes full on and appoints
To ague and cold spasms for evermore.
A noble picture! worthy of the shout
Wherewith along the streets the people bore
Its cherub-faces which the sun threw out
Until they stooped and entered the church door.
Yet rightly was young Giotto talked about,
Whom Cimabue found among the sheep,
And knew, as gods know gods, and carried home
To paint the things he had painted, with a deep

And fuller insight, and so overcome
His chapel-Lady with a heavenlier sweep
Of light: for thus we mount into the sum
Of great things known or acted. I hold, too,
That Cimabue smiled upon the lad
At the first stroke which passed what he could do,
Or else his Virgin's smile had never had
Such sweetness in 't. All great men who foreknew
Their heirs in art, for art's sake have been glad,
And bent their old white heads as if uncrowned,
Fanatics of their pure Ideals still
Far more than of their triumphs, which were found
With some less vehement struggle of the will.
If old Margheritone trembled, swooned
And died despairing at the open sill
Of other men's achievements (who achieved,
By loving art beyond the master), he
Was old Margheritone, and conceived
Never, at first youth and most ecstasy,
A Virgin like that dream of one, which heaved
The death-sigh from his heart. If wistfully
Margheritone sickened at the smell
Of Cimabue's laurel, let him go!
For Cimabue stood up very well
In spite of Giotto's, and Angelico
The artist-saint kept smiling in his cell
The smile with which he welcomed the sweet slow
Inbreak of angels (whitening through the dim
That he might paint them), while the sudden sense
Of Raffael's future was revealed to him
By force of his own fair works' competence.
The same blue waters where the dolphins swim
Suggest the tritons. Through the blue Immense
Strike out, all swimmers! cling not in the way
Of one another, so to sink; but learn
The strong man's impulse, catch the freshening spray
He throws up in his motions, and discern
By his clear westering eye, the time of day.
Thou, God, hast set us worthy gifts to earn
Besides thy heaven and Thee! and when I say
There 's room here for the weakest man alive
To live and die, there 's room too, I repeat,
For all the strongest to live well, and strive
Their own way, by their individual heat, —
Like some new bee-swarm leaving the old hive,
Despite the wax which tempts so violet-sweet.
Then let the living live, the dead retain
Their grave-cold flowers! — though honor 's best supplied
By bringing actions, to prove theirs not vain.

Cold graves, we say? it shall be testified
That living men who burn in heart and brain,
Without the dead were colder. If we tried
To sink the past beneath our feet, be sure
The future would not stand. Precipitate
This old roof from the shrine, and, insecure,
The nesting swallows fly off, mate from mate.
How scant the gardens, if the graves were fewer!
The tall green poplars grew no longer straight
Whose tops not looked to Troy. Would any fight
For Athens, and not swear by Marathon?
Who dared build temples, without tombs in sight?
Or live, without some dead man's benison?
Or seek truth, hope for good, and strive for right,
If, looking up, he saw not in the sun
Some angel of the martyrs all day long

Standing and waiting? Your last rhythm will need
Your earliest key-note. Could I sing this song,
If my dead masters had not taken heed
To help the heavens and earth to make me strong,
As the wind ever will find out some reed
And touch it to such issues as belong
To such a frail thing? None may grudge the Dead
Libations from full cups. Unless we choose
To look back to the hills behind us spread,
The plains before us sadden and confuse;
If orphaned, we are disinherited.

I would but turn these lachrymals to use,
And pour fresh oil in from the olive-grove,
To furnish them as new lamps. Shall I say
What made my heart beat with exulting love
A few weeks back? —
The day was such a day
As Florence owes the sun. The sky above,
Its weight upon the mountains seemed to lay,
And palpitate in glory, like a dove
Who has flown too fast, full-hearted — take away
The image! for the heart of man beat higher
That day in Florence, flooding all her streets
And piazzas with a tumult and desire.
The people, with accumulated heats
And faces turned one way, as if one fire
Both drew and flushed them, left their ancient beats
And went up towards the palace-Pitti wall
To thank their Grand-duke who, not quite of course,
Had graciously permitted, at their call,
The citizens to use their civic force
To guard their civic homes. So, one and all,
The Tuscan cities streamed up to the source
Of this new good at Florence, taking it
As good so far, presageful of more good, —
The first torch of Italian freedom, lit
To toss in the next tiger's face who should
Approach too near them in a greedy fit, —
The first pulse of an even flow of blood
To prove the level of Italian veins
Towards rights perceived and granted. How we gazed
From Casa Guidi windows while, in trains
Of orderly procession — banners raised,
And intermittent bursts of martial strains
Which died upon the shout, as if amazed
By gladness beyond music — they passed on!
The Magistracy, with insignia, passed, —
And all the people shouted in the sun,
And all the thousand windows which had cast
A ripple of silks in blue and scarlet down
(As if the houses overflowed at last),
Seemed growing larger with fair heads and eyes.
The Lawyers passed, — and still arose the shout,
And hands broke from the windows to surprise
Those grave calm brows with bay-tree leaves thrown out.
The Priesthood passed, — the friars with worldly-wise
Keen sidelong glances from their beards about
The street to see who shouted; many a monk
Who takes a long rope in the waist, was there:
Whereat the popular exultation drunk
With indrawn 'vivas' the whole sunny air,
While through the murmuring windows rose and sunk
A cloud of kerchiefed hands, — 'The church makes fair
Her welcome in the new Pope's name.' Ensued
The black sign of the 'Martyrs' — (name no name,
But count the graves in silence). Next were viewed
The Artists; next, the Trades; and after came
The People, — flag and sign, and rights as good —
And very loud the shout was for that same

Motto, ‘Il popolo.’ Il Popolo, —
The word means dukedom, empire, majesty,
And kings in such an hour might read it so.
And next, with banners, each in his degree,
Deputed representatives a-row
Of every separate state of Tuscany:
Siena’s she-wolf, bristling on the fold
Of the first flag, preceded Pisa’s hare,
And Massa’s lion floated calm in gold,
Pienza’s following with his silver stare,
Arezzo’s steed pranced clear from bridle-hold, —
And well might shout our Florence, greeting there
These, and more brethren. Last, the world had sent
The various children of her teeming flanks —
Greeks, English, French — as if to a parliament
Of lovers of her Italy in ranks,
Each bearing its land’s symbol reverent;
At which the stones seemed breaking into thanks
And rattling up the sky, such sounds in proof
Arose; the very house-walls seemed to bend;
The very windows, up from door to roof,
Flashed out a rapture of bright heads, to mend
With passionate looks the gesture’s whirling off
A hurricane of leaves. Three hours did end
While all these passed; and ever in the crowd,
Rude men, unconscious of the tears that kept
Their beards moist, shouted; some few laughed aloud,
And none asked any why they laughed and wept:
Friends kissed each other’s cheeks, and foes long vowed
More warmly did it; two months’ babies leapt
Right upward in their mother’s arms, whose black
Wide glittering eyes looked elsewhere; lovers pressed
Each before either, neither glancing back;
And peasant maidens smoothly ’tired and tressed
Forgot to finger on their throats the slack
Great pearl-strings; while old blind men would not rest,
But pattered with their staves and slid their shoes
Along the stones, and smiled as if they saw.
O heaven, I think that day had noble use
Among God’s days! So near stood Right and Law,
Both mutually forborne! Law would not bruise
Nor Right deny, and each in reverent awe
Honored the other. And if, ne’ertheless,
That good day’s sun delivered to the vines
No charta, and the liberal Duke’s excess
Did scarce exceed a Guelf’s or Ghibelline’s
In any special actual righteousness
Of what that day he granted, still the signs
Are good and full of promise, we must say,
When multitudes approach their kings with prayers
And kings concede their people’s right to pray
Both in one sunshine. Griefs are not despairs,
So uttered, nor can royal claims dismay
When men from humble homes and ducal chairs
Hate wrong together. It was well to view
Those banners ruffled in a ruler’s face
Inscribed, ‘Live freedom, union, and all true
Brave patriots who are aided by God’s grace!’
Nor was it ill when Leopoldo drew
His little children to the window-place
He stood in at the Pitti, to suggest
They too should govern as the people willed.
What a cry rose then! some, who saw the best,
Declared his eyes filled up and overfilled
With good warm human tears which unrepressed
Ran down. I like his face; the forehead’s build

Has no capacious genius, yet perhaps
Sufficient comprehension, — mild and sad,
And careful nobly, — not with care that wraps
Self-loving hearts, to stifle and make mad,
But careful with the care that shuns a lapse
Of faith and duty, studious not to add
A burden in the gathering of a gain.
And so, God save the Duke, I say with those
Who that day shouted it; and while dukes reign,
May all wear in the visible overflows
Of spirit, such a look of careful pain!
For God must love it better than repose.

And all the people who went up to let
Their hearts out to that Duke, as has been told —
Where guess ye that the living people met,
Kept tryst, formed ranks, chose leaders, first unrolled
Their banners?
In the Loggia? where is set
Cellini's godlike Perseus, bronze or gold,
(How name the metal, when the statue flings
Its soul so in your eyes?) with brow and sword
Superbly calm, as all opposing things,
Slain with the Gorgon, were no more abhorred
Since ended?
No, the people sought no wings
From Perseus in the Loggia, nor implored
An inspiration in the place beside
From that dim bust of Brutus, jagged and grand,
Where Buonarroti passionately tried
From out the close-clenched marble to demand
The head of Rome's sublimest homicide,
Then dropt the quivering mallet from his hand,
Despairing he could find no model-stuff
Of Brutus in all Florence where he found
The gods and gladiators thick enough.
Nor there! the people chose still holier ground:
The people, who are simple, blind and rough,
Know their own angels, after looking round.
Whom chose they then? where met they?
On the stone
Called Dante's, — a plain flat stone scarce discerned
From others in the pavement, — whereupon
He used to bring his quiet chair out, turned
To Brunelleschi's church, and pour alone
The lava of his spirit when it burned:
It is not cold to-day. O passionate
Poor Dante who, a banished Florentine,
Didst sit austere at banquets of the great
And muse upon this far-off stone of thine
And think how oft some passer used to wait
A moment, in the golden day's decline,
With 'Good night, dearest Dante!' — well, good night!
I muse now, Dante, and think verily,
Though chapelled in the byeway out of sight,
Ravenna's bones would thrill with ecstasy,
Couldst know thy favorite stone's elected right
As tryst-place for thy Tuscans to foresee
Their earliest chartas from. Good night, good morn,
Henceforward, Dante! now my soul is sure
That thine is better comforted of scorn,
And looks down earthward in completer cure
Than when, in Santa Croce church forlorn
Of any corpse, the architect and hewer
Did pile the empty marbles as thy tomb.
For now thou art no longer exiled, now
Best honored: we salute thee who art come
Back to the old stone with a softer brow
Than Giotto drew upon the wall, for some
Good lovers of our age to track and plough
Their way to, through time's ordures stratified,
And startle broad awake into the dull
Bargello chamber: now thou 'rt milder-eyed, —
Now Beatrix may leap up glad to cull
Thy first smile, even in heaven and at her side,
Like that which, nine years old, looked beautiful
At May-game. What do I say? I only meant
That tender Dante loved his Florence well,
While Florence, now, to love him is content;

And, mark ye, that the piercingest sweet smell
Of love's dear incense by the living sent
To find the dead, is not accessible
To lazy livers — no narcotic, — not
Swung in a censer to a sleepy tune, —
But trod out in the morning air by hot
Quick spirits who tread firm to ends foreshown,
And use the name of greatness unforgot,
To meditate what greatness may be done.

For Dante sits in heaven and ye stand here,
And more remains for doing, all must feel,
Than trysting on his stone from year to year
To shift processions, civic toe to heel,
The town's thanks to the Pitti. Are ye freer
For what was felt that day? a chariot-wheel
May spin fast, yet the chariot never roll.
But if that day suggested something good,
And bettered, with one purpose, soul by soul, —
Better means freer. A land's brotherhood
Is most puissant: men, upon the whole,
Are what they can be, — nations, what they would.

Will, therefore, to be strong, thou Italy!
Will to be noble! Austrian Metternich
Can fix no yoke unless the neck agree;
And thine is like the lion's when the thick
Dews shudder from it, and no man would be
The stroker of his mane, which less would prick
His nostril with a reed. When nations roar
Like lions, who shall tame them and defraud
Of the due pasture by the river-shore?
Roar, therefore, shake your dewlaps dry abroad:
The amphitheatre with open door
Leads back upon the benches who applaud
The last spear-thruster.
Yet the Heavens forbid
That we should call on passion to confront
The brutal with the brutal and, amid
This ripening world, suggest a lion-hunt
And lion's-vengeance for the wrongs men did
And do now, though the spears are getting blunt.
We only call, because the sight and proof
Of lion-strength hurts nothing; and to show
A lion-heart, and measure paw with hoof,
Helps something, even, and will instruct a foe
As well as the onslaught, how to stand aloof:
Or else the world gets past the mere brute blow
Or given or taken. Children use the fist
Until they are of age to use the brain;
And so we needed Cæsars to assist
Man's justice, and Napoleons to explain
God's counsel, when a point was nearly missed,
Until our generations should attain
Christ's stature nearer. Not that we, alas,
Attain already; but a single inch
Will raise to look down on the swordsman's pass,
As knightly Roland on the coward's flinch:
And, after chloroform and ether-gas,
We find out slowly what the bee and finch
Have ready found, through Nature's lamp in each,
How to our races we may justify
Our individual claims and, as we reach
Our own grapes, bend the top vines to supply
The children's uses, — how to fill a breach
With olive-branches, — how to quench a lie
With truth, and smite a foe upon the cheek
With Christ's most conquering kiss. Why, these are things
Worth a great nation's finding, to prove weak
The 'glorious arms' of military kings.
And so with wide embrace, my England, seek
To stifle the bad heat and flickerings
Of this world's false and nearly expended fire!
Draw palpitating arrows to the wood,

And twang abroad thy high hopes and thy higher
Resolves, from that most virtuous altitude!
Till nations shall unconsciously aspire
By looking up to thee, and learn that good
And glory are not different. Announce law
By freedom; exalt chivalry by peace;
Instruct how clear calm eyes can overawe,
And how pure hands, stretched simply to release
A bond-slave, will not need a sword to draw
To be held dreadful. O my England, crease
Thy purple with no alien agonies,
No struggles toward encroachment, no vile war!
Disband thy captains, change thy victories,
Be henceforth prosperous as the angels are,
Helping, not humbling.

Drums and battle-cries
Go out in music of the morning-star —
And soon we shall have thinkers in the place
Of fighters, each found able as a man
To strike electric influence through a race,
Unstayed by city-wall and barbican.
The poet shall look grander in the face
Than even of old (when he of Greece began
To sing 'that Achillean wrath which slew
So many heroes') — seeing he shall treat
The deeds of souls heroic toward the true,
The oracles of life, previsions sweet
And awful like divine swans gliding through
White arms of Ledas, which will leave the heat
Of their escaping godship to undue
The human medium with a heavenly flush.

Meanwhile, in this same Italy we want
Not popular passion, to arise and crush,
But popular conscience, which may covenant
For what it knows. Concede without a blush,
To grant the 'civic guard' is not to grant
The civic spirit, living and awake:
Those lappets on your shoulders, citizens,
Your eyes strain after sideways till they ache
(While still, in admirations and amens,
The crowd comes up on festa-days to take
The great sight in) — are not intelligence,
Not courage even — alas, if not the sign
Of something very noble, they are nought;
For every day ye dress your sallow kine
With fringes down their cheeks, though unbesought
They loll their heavy heads and drag the wine
And bear the wooden yoke as they were taught
The first day. What ye want is light — indeed
Not sunlight — (ye may well look up surprised
To those unfathomable heavens that feed
Your purple hills) — but God's light organized
In some high soul, crowned capable to lead
The conscious people, conscious and advised, —
For if we lift a people like mere clay,
It falls the same. We want thee, O unfound
And sovran teacher! if thy beard be gray
Or black, we bid thee rise up from the ground
And speak the word God giveth thee to say,
Inspiring into all this people round,
Instead of passion, thought, which pioneers
All generous passion, purifies from sin,
And strikes the hour for. Rise up, teacher! here's
A crowd to make a nation! — best begin
By making each a man, till all be peers
Of earth's true patriots and pure martyrs in
Knowing and daring. Best unbar the doors
Which Peter's heirs keep locked so overclose
They only let the mice across the floors,
While every churchman dangles, as he goes,
The great key at his girdle, and abhors
In Christ's name, meekly. Open wide the house,
Concede the entrance with Christ's liberal mind.

And set the tables with his wine and bread.
What! 'commune in both kinds?' In every kind —
Wine, wafer, love, hope, truth, unlimited,
Nothing kept back. For when a man is blind
To starlight, will he see the rose is red?
A bondsman shivering at a Jesuit's foot —
'Væ! meâ culpâ!' — is not like to stand
A freedman at a despot's and dispute
His titles by the balance in his hand,
Weighing them 'suo jure.' Tend the root
If careful of the branches, and expand
The inner souls of men before you strive
For civic heroes.

But the teacher, where?
From all these crowded faces, all alive,
Eyes, of their own lids flashing themselves bare,
And brows that with a mobile life contrive
A deeper shadow, — may we in no wise dare
To put a finger out and touch a man,
And cry 'this is the leader'? What, all these!
Broad heads, black eyes, — yet not a soul that ran
From God down with a message? All, to please
The donna waving measures with her fan,
And not the judgment-angel on his knees
(The trumpet just an inch off from his lips),
Who when he breathes next, will put out the sun?

Yet mankind's self were foundered in eclipse,
If lacking doers, with great works to be done;
And lo, the startled earth already dips
Back into light; a better day 's begun;
And soon this leader, teacher, will stand plain,
And build the golden pipes and synthesize
This people-organ for a holy strain.
We hold this hope, and still in all these eyes
Go sounding for the deep look which shall drain
Suffused thought into channelled enterprise
Where is the teacher? What now may he do,
Who shall do greatly? Doth he gird his waist
With a monk's rope, like Luther? or pursue
The goat, like Tell? or dry his nets in haste,
Like Masaniello when the sky was blue?
Keep house, like other peasants, with inlaced
Bare brawny arms about a favorite child,
And meditative looks beyond the door
(But not to mark the kidling's teeth have filed
The green shoots of his vine which last year bore
Full twenty bunches), or, on triple-piled
Throne-velvets sit at ease to bless the poor,
Like other pontiffs, in the Poorest's name?
The old tiara keeps itself aslope
Upon his steady brows which, all the same,
Bend mildly to permit the people's hope?

Whatever hand shall grasp this oriflamme,
Whatever man (last peasant or first pope
Seeking to free his country) shall appear,
Teach, lead, strike fire into the masses, fill
These empty bladders with fine air, insphere
These wills into a unity of will,
And make of Italy a nation — dear
And blessed be that man! the Heavens shall kill
No leaf the earth lets grow for him, and Death
Shall cast him back upon the lap of Life
To live more surely, in a clarion-breath
Of hero-music. Brutus with the knife,
Rienzi with the fasces, throb beneath
Rome's stones, — and more who threw away joy's fife
Like Pallas, that the beauty of their souls
Might ever shine untroubled and entire:
But if it can be true that he who rolls
The Church's thunders will reserve her fire
For only light, — from eucharistic bowls
Will pour new life for nations that expire,
And rend the scarlet of his papal vest
To gird the weak loins of his countrymen, —
I hold that he surpasses all the rest
Of Romans, heroes, patriots; and that when
He sat down on the throne, he dispossessed

The first graves of some glory. See again,
This country-saving is a glorious thing:
And if a common man achieved it? well.
Say, a rich man did? excellent. A king?
That grows sublime. A priest? improbable.
A pope? Ah, there we stop, and cannot bring
Our faith up to the leap, with history's bell
So heavy round the neck of it — albeit
We fain would grant the possibility
For *thy* sake, Pio Nono!

Stretch thy feet
In that case — I will kiss them reverently
As any pilgrim to the papal seat:
And, such proved possible, thy throne to me
Shall seem as holy a place as Pellico's
Venetian dungeon, or as Spielberg's grate
At which the Lombard woman hung the rose
Of her sweet soul by its own dewy weight,
To feel the dungeon round her sunshine close,
And pining so, died early, yet too late
For what she suffered. Yea, I will not choose
Betwixt thy throne, Pope Pius, and the spot
Marked red for ever, spite of rains and dews,
Where Two fell riddled by the Austrian's shot,
The brothers Bandiera, who accuse,
With one same mother-voice and face (that what
They speak may be invincible) the sins
Of earth's tormentors before God the just,
Until the unconscious thunderbolt begins
To loosen in his grasp.
And yet we must
Beware, and mark the natural kiths and kins
Of circumstance and office, and distrust
The rich man reasoning in a poor man's hut,
The poet who neglects pure truth to prove
Statistic fact, the child who leaves a rut
For a smoother road, the priest who vows his glove
Exhales no grace, the prince who walks afoot
The woman who has sworn she will not love,
And this Ninth Pius in Seventh Gregory's chair,
With Andrea Doria's forehead!

Count what goes
To making up a pope, before he wear
That triple crown. We pass the world-wide throes
Which went to make the popedom, — the despair
Of free men, good men, wise men; the dread shows
Of women's faces, by the faggot's flash
Tossed out, to the minutest stir and throb
O' the white lips, the least tremble of a lash,
To glut the red stare of a licensed mob;
The short mad cries down oubliettes, and plash
So horribly far off; priests, trained to rob,
And kings that, like encouraged nightmares, sat
On nations' hearts most heavily distressed
With monstrous sights and apophthegms of fate —
We pass these things, — because 'the times' are prest
With necessary charges of the weight
Of all this sin, and 'Calvin, for the rest,
Made bold to burn Servetus. Ah, men err!' —
And so do *churches!* which is all we mean
To bring to proof in any register
Of theological fat kine and lean:
So drive them back into the pens! refer
Old sins (with pourpoint, 'quotha' and 'I ween')
Entirely to the old times, the old times;
Nor ever ask why this preponderant
Infallible pure Church could set her chimes
Most loudly then, just then, — most jubilant,
Precisely then, when mankind stood in crimes
Full heart-deep, and Heaven's judgments were not scant.
Inquire still less, what signifies a church
Of perfect inspiration and pure laws
Who burns the first man with a brimstone-torch,

And grinds the second, bone by bone, because
The times, forsooth, are used to rack and scorch!
What *is* a holy Church unless she awes
The times down from their sins? Did Christ select
Such amiable times to come and teach
Love to, and mercy? The whole world were wrecked
If every mere great man, who lives to reach
A little leaf of popular respect,
Attained not simply by some special breach
In the age's customs, by some precedence
In thought and act, which, having proved him higher
Than those he lived with, proved his competence
In helping them to wonder and aspire.

My words are guiltless of the bigot's sense;
My soul has fire to mingle with the fire
Of all these souls, within or out of doors
Of Rome's church or another. I believe
In one Priest, and one temple with its floors
Of shining jasper gloom'd at morn and eve
By countless knees of earnest auditors,
And crystal walls too lucid to perceive,
That none may take the measure of the place
And say 'So far the porphyry, then, the flint —
To this mark mercy goes, and there ends grace,'
Though still the permeable crystals hint
At some white starry distance, bathed in space.
I feel how nature's ice-crusts keep the dint
Of undersprings of silent Deity.
I hold the articulated gospels which
Show Christ among us crucified on tree.
I love all who love truth, if poor or rich
In what they have won of truth possessively.
No altars and no hands defiled with pitch
Shall scare me off, but I will pray and eat
With all these — taking leave to choose my ewers —
And say at last 'Your visible churches cheat
Their inward types; and, if a church assures
Of standing without failure and defeat,
The same both fails and lies.'

To leave which lures
Of wider subject through past years, — behold,
We come back from the popedom to the pope,
To ponder what he *must* be, ere we are bold
For what he *may* be, with our heavy hope
To trust upon his soul. So, fold by fold,
Explore this mummy in the priestly cope,
Transmitted through the darks of time, to catch
The man within the wrappage, and discern
How he, an honest man, upon the watch
Full fifty years for what a man may learn,
Contrived to get just there; with what a snatch
Of old-world oboli he had to earn
The passage through; with what a drowsy sop,
To drench the busy barkings of his brain;
What ghosts of pale tradition, wreathed with hope
'Gainst wakeful thought, he had to entertain
For heavenly visions; and consent to stop
The clock at noon, and let the hour remain
(Without vain windings-up) inviolate
Against all chimings from the belfry. Lo,
From every given pope you must abate,
Albeit you love him, some things — good, you know —
Which every given heretic you hate,
Assumes for his, as being plainly so.
A pope must hold by popes a little, — yes,
By councils, from Nicæa up to Trent, —
By hierocratic empire, more or less
Irresponsible to men, — he must resent
Each man's particular conscience, and repress
Inquiry, meditation, argument,
As tyrants faction. Also, he must not
Love truth too dangerously, but prefer

'The interests of the Church' (because a blot
Is better than a rent, in miniver) —
Submit to see the people swallow hot
Husk-porridge, which his chartered churchmen stir
Quoting the only true God's epigraph,
'Feed my lambs, Peter!' — must consent to sit
Attesting with his pastoral ring and staff
To such a picture of our Lady, hit
Off well by artist-angels (though not half
As fair as Giotto would have painted it) —
To such a vial, where a dead man's blood
Runs yearly warm beneath a churchman's finger, —
To such a holy house of stone and wood,
Whereof a cloud of angels was the bringer
From Bethlehem to Loreto. Were it good
For any pope on earth to be a flinger
Of stones against these high-niched counterfeits?
Apostates only are iconoclasts.
He dares not say, while this false thing abets
That true thing, 'This is false.' He keeps his fasts
And prayers, as prayer and fast were silver frets
To change a note upon a string that lasts,
And make a lie a virtue. Now, if he
Did more than this, higher hoped, and braver dared,
I think he were a pope in jeopardy,
Or no pope rather, for his truth had barred
The vaulting of his life, — and certainly,
If he do only this, mankind's regard
Moves on from him at once, to seek some new
Teacher and leader. He is good and great
According to the deeds a pope can do;
Most liberal, save those bonds; affectionate,
As princes may be, and, as priests are, true;
But only the Ninth Pius after eight,
When all's praised most. At best and hopefullest,
He's pope — we want a man! his heart beats warm,
But, like the prince enchanted to the waist,
He sits in stone and hardens by a charm
Into the marble of his throne high-placed.
Mild benediction waves his saintly arm —
So, good! but what we want's a perfect man,
Complete and all alive: half travertine
Half suits our need, and ill subserves our plan.
Feet, knees, nerves, sinews, energies divine
Were never yet too much for men who ran
In such hard ways as must be this of thine,
Deliverer whom we seek, whoe'er thou art,
Pope, prince, or peasant! If, indeed, the first,
The noblest, therefore! since the heroic heart
Within thee must be great enough to burst
Those trammels buckling to the baser part
Thy saintly peers in Rome, who crossed and cursed
With the same finger.

Come, appear, be found,
If pope or peasant, come! we hear the cock,
The courtier of the mountains when first crowned
With golden dawn; and orient glories flock
To meet the sun upon the highest ground.
Take voice and work! we wait to hear thee knock
At some one of our Florentine nine gates,
On each of which was imaged a sublime
Face of a Tuscan genius, which, for hate's
And love's sake, both, our Florence in her prime
Turned boldly on all comers to her states,
As heroes turned their shields in antique time
Emblazoned with honorable acts. And though
The gates are blank now of such images,
And Petrarch looks no more from Nicolo
Toward dear Arezzo, 'twixt the acacia-trees,

Nor Dante, from gate Gallo — still we know,
Despite the razing of the blazonries,
Remains the consecration of the shield:
The dead heroic faces will start out
On all these gates, if foes should take the field,
And blend sublimely, at the earliest shout,
With living heroes who will scorn to yield
A hair's-breadth even, when, gazing round about,
They find in what a glorious company
They fight the foes of Florence. Who will grudge
His one poor life, when that great man we see
Has given five hundred years, the world being judge,
To help the glory of his Italy?
Who, born the fair side of the Alps, will budge,
When Dante stays, when Ariosto stays,
When Petrarch stays for ever? Ye bring swords,
My Tuscans? Ay, if wanted in this haze,
Bring swords: but first bring souls! — bring thoughts and words,
Unrusted by a tear of yesterday's,
Yet awful by its wrong, — and cut these cords,
And mow this green lush falseness to the roots,
And shut the mouth of hell below the swathe!
And, if ye can bring songs too, let the lute's
Recoverable music softly bathe
Some poet's hand, that, through all bursts and bruits
Of popular passion, all unripe and rathe
Convictions of the popular intellect,
Ye may not lack a finger up the air,
Annunciative, reproving, pure, erect,
To show which way your first Ideal bare
The whiteness of its wings when (sorely pecked
By falcons on your wrists) it unaware
Arose up overhead and out of sight.

Meanwhile, let all the far ends of the world
Breathe back the deep breath of their old delight,
To swell the Italian banner just unfurled.
Help, lands of Europe! for, if Austria fight,
The drums will bar your slumber. Had ye curled
The laurel for your thousand artists' brows,
If these Italian hands had planted none?
Can any sit down idle in the house
Nor hear appeals from Buonarroti's stone
And Raffael's canvas, rousing and to rouse?
Where 's Poussin's master? Gallic Avignon
Bred Laura, and Vaucluse's fount has stirred
The heart of France too strongly, as it lets
Its little stream out (like a wizard's bird
Which bounds upon its emerald wing and wets
The rocks on each side), that she should not gird
Her loins with Charlemagne's sword when foes beset
The country of her Petrarch. Spain may well
Be minded how from Italy she caught,
To mingle with her tinkling Moorish bell,
A fuller cadence and a subtler thought.
And even the New World, the receptacle
Of freemen, may send glad men, as it ought,
To greet Vespucci Amerigo's door.
While England claims, by trump of poetry,
Verona, Venice, the Ravenna-shore,
And dearer holds John Milton's Fiesole
Than Langland's Malvern with the stars in flower.

And Vallombrosa, we two went to see
Last June, beloved companion, — where sublime
The mountains live in holy families,
And the slow pinewoods ever climb and climb
Half up their breasts, just stagger as they seize
Some gray crag, drop back with it many a time,
And straggle blindly down the precipice.
The Vallombrosan brooks were strewn as thick

That June day, knee-deep with dead beechen leaves,
As Milton saw them ere his heart grew sick
And his eyes blind. I think the monks and beeves
Are all the same too: scarce have they changed the wick
On good Saint Gualbert's altar which receives
The convent's pilgrims; and the pool in front
(Wherein the hill-stream trout are cast, to wait
The beatific vision and the grunt
Used at refectory) keeps its weedy state,
To baffle saintly abbots who would count
The fish across their breviary nor 'bate
The measure of their steps. O waterfalls
And forests! sound and silence! mountains bare
That leap up peak by peak and catch the palls
Of purple and silver mist to rend and share
With one another, at electric calls
Of life in the sunbeams, — till we cannot dare
Fix your shapes, count your number! we must think
Your beauty and your glory helped to fill
The cup of Milton's soul so to the brink,
He never more was thirsty when God's will
Had shattered to his sense the last chain-link
By which he had drawn from Nature's visible
The fresh well-water. Satisfied by this,
He sang of Adam's paradise and smiled,
Remembering Vallombrosa. Therefore is
The place divine to English man and child,
And pilgrims leave their souls here in a kiss.

For Italy's the whole earth's treasury, piled
With reveries of gentle ladies, flung
Aside, like ravelled silk, from life's worn stuff;
With coins of scholars' fancy, which, being rung
On work-day counter, still sound silver-proof;
In short, with all the dreams of dreamers young,
Before their heads have time for slipping off
Hope's pillow to the ground. How oft, indeed,
We 've sent our souls out from the rigid north,
On bare white feet which would not print nor bleed,
To climb the Alpine passes and look forth,
Where booming low the Lombard rivers lead
To gardens, vineyards, all a dream is worth, —
Sights, thou and I, Love, have seen afterward
From Tuscan Bellosguardo, wide awake,
When, standing on the actual blessed sward
Where Galileo stood at nights to take
The vision of the stars, we have found it hard,
Gazing upon the earth and heaven, to make
A choice of beauty.
Therefore let us all
Refreshed in England or in other land,
By visions, with their fountain-rise and fall,
Of this earth's darling, — we, who understand
A little how the Tuscan musical
Vowels do round themselves as if they planned
Eternities of separate sweetness, — we,
Who loved Sorrento vines in picture-book,
Or ere in wine-cup we pledged faith or glee, —
Who loved Rome's wolf with demi-gods at suck,
Or ere we loved truth's own divinity, —
Who loved, in brief, the classic hill and brook,
And Ovid's dreaming tales and Petrarch's song,
Or ere we loved Love's self even, — let us give

The blessing of our souls (and wish them strong
To bear it to the height where prayers arrive,
When faithful spirits pray against a wrong,)
To this great cause of southern men who strive
In God's name for man's rights, and shall not fail.

Behold, they shall not fail. The shouts ascend
Above the shrieks, in Naples, and prevail.
Rows of shot corpses, waiting for the end
Of burial, seem to smile up straight and pale
Into the azure air and apprehend
That final gun-flash from Palermo's coast
Which lightens their apocalypse of death.
So let them die! The world shows nothing lost;
Therefore, not blood. Above or underneath,
What matter, brothers, if ye keep your post
On duty's side? As sword returns to sheath,
So dust to grave, but souls find place in Heaven.
Heroic daring is the true success,
The eucharistic bread requires no leaven;
And though your ends were hopeless, we should bless
Your cause as holy. Strive — and, having striven,
Take, for God's recompense, that righteousness!

PART II

I wrote a meditation and a dream,
Hearing a little child sing in the street:
I leant upon his music as a theme,
Till it gave way beneath my heart's full beat
Which tried at an exultant prophecy
But dropped before the measure was complete —
Alas, for songs and hearts! O Tuscany,
O Dante's Florence, is the type too plain?
Didst thou, too, only sing of liberty
As little children take up a high strain
With unintentioned voices, and break off
To sleep upon their mothers' knees again?
Couldst thou not watch one hour? then, sleep enough —
That sleep may hasten manhood and sustain
The faint pale spirit with some muscular stuff.

But we, who cannot slumber as thou dost,
We thinkers, who have thought for thee and failed,
We hopers, who have hoped for thee and lost,
We poets, wandered round by dreams, who hailed
From this Atrides' roof (with lintel-post
Which still drips blood, — the worse part hath prevailed)
The fire-voice of the beacons to declare
Troy taken, sorrow ended, — cozened through
A crimson sunset in a misty air,
What now remains for such as we, to do?
God's judgments, peradventure, will He bare
To the roots of thunder, if we kneel and sue?

From Casa Guidi windows I looked forth,
And saw ten thousand eyes of Florentines
Flash back the triumph of the Lombard north, —
Saw fifty banners, freighted with the signs
And exultations of the awakened earth,
Float on above the multitude in lines,
Straight to the Pitti. So, the vision went.
And so, between those populous rough hands
Raised in the sun, Duke Leopold outleant,
And took the patriot's oath which henceforth stands
Among the oaths of perjurers, eminent
To catch the lightnings ripened for these lands.

Why swear at all, thou false Duke Leopold?
What need to swear? What need to boast thy blood

Unspoilt of Austria, and thy heart unsold
Away from Florence ? It was understood
God made thee not too vigorous or too bold;
And men had patience with thy quiet mood,
And women, pity, as they saw thee pace
Their festive streets with premature gray hairs.
We turned the mild dejection of thy face
To princely meanings, took thy wrinkling cares
For ruffling hopes, and called thee weak, not base.
Nay, better light the torches for more prayers
And smoke the pale Madonnas at the shrine,
Being still 'our poor Grand-duke, our good Grand-duke,
Who cannot help the Austrian in his line,' —
Than write an oath upon a nation's book
For men to spit at with scorn's blurring brine !
Who dares forgive what none can overlook ?

For me, I do repent me in this dust
Of towns and temples which makes Italy, —
I sigh amid the sighs which breathe a gust
Of dying century to century
Around us on the uneven crater-crust
Of these old worlds, — I bow my soul and knee.
Absolve me, patriots, of my woman's fault
That ever I believed the man was true !
These sceptred strangers shun the common salt,
And, therefore, when the general board 's in view
And they stand up to carve for blind and halt,
The wise suspect the viands which ensue.
I much repent that, in this time and place
Where many corpse-lights of experience burn
From Cæsar's and Lorenzo's festering race,
To enlighten groping reasoners, I could learn
No better counsel for a simple case
Than to put faith in princes, in my turn.
Had all the death-piles of the ancient years
Flared up in vain before me ? knew I not
What stench arises from some purple gears ?
And how the sceptres witness whence they got
Their briar-wood, crackling through the atmosphere's
Foul smoke, by princely perjuries, kept hot ?
Forgive me, ghosts of patriots, — Brutus, thou,
Who trailest downhill into life again
Thy blood-weighed cloak, to indict me with thy slow
Reproachful eyes ! — for being taught in vain
That, while the illegitimate Cæsars show
Of meaner stature than the first full strain
(Confessed incompetent to conquer Gaul),
They swoon as feebly and cross Rubicons
As rashly as any Julius of them all !
Forgive, that I forgot the mind which runs
Through absolute races, too unsceptical !
I saw the man among his little sons,
His lips were warm with kisses while he swore;
And I, because I am a woman — I,
Who felt my own child's coming life before
The prescience of my soul, and held faith high, —
I could not bear to think, whoever bore,
That lips, so warmed, could shape so cold a lie.

From Casa Guidi windows I looked out,
Again looked, and beheld a different sight.
The Duke had fled before the people's shout
'Long live the Duke !' A people, to speak right,
Must speak as soft as courtiers, lest a doubt
Should curdle brows of gracious sovereigns, white.
Moreover that same dangerous shouting meant
Some gratitude for future favors, which
Were only promised, the Constituent

Implied, the whole being subject to the hitch
In 'motu proprios,' very incident
To all these Czars, from Paul to Paulovitch.
Whereat the people rose up in the dust
Of the ruler's flying feet, and shouted still
And loudly; only, this time, as was just,
Not 'Live the Duke,' who had fled for good or ill,
But 'Live the People,' who remained and must,
The unrenounced and unrenounceable.
Long live the people! How they lived! and boiled
And bubbled in the cauldron of the street:
How the young blustered, nor the old recoiled,
And what a thunderous stir of tongues and feet
Trod flat the palpitating bells and foiled
The joy-guns of their echo, shattering it!
How down they pulled the Duke's arms everywhere!
How up they set new café-signs, to show
Where patriots might sip ices in pure air —
(The fresh paint smelling somewhat)! To and fro
How marched the civic guard, and stopped to stare
When boys broke windows in a civic glow!
How rebel songs were sung to loyal tunes,
And bishops cursed in ecclesiastic metres:
How all the Circoli grew large as moons,
And all the speakers, moonstruck, — thankful greeters
Of prospects which struck poor the ducal boons,
A mere free Press, and Chambers! — frank repeaters
Of great Guerazzi's praises — 'There 's a man,
The father of the land, who, truly great,
Takes off that national disgrace and ban,
The farthing tax upon our Florence-gate,
And saves Italia as he only can!'
How all the nobles fled, and would not wait,
Because they were most noble, — which being so,
How Liberals vowed to burn their palaces,
Because free Tuscans were not free to go!
How grown men raged at Austria's wickedness,
And smoked, — while fifty striplings in a row
Marched straight to Piedmont for the wrong's redress!
You say we failed in duty, we who wore
Black velvet like Italian democrats,
Who slashed our sleeves like patriots, nor forswore
The true republic in the form of hats?
We chased the archbishop from the Duomo door,
We chalked the walls with bloody caveats
Against all tyrants. If we did not fight
Exactly, we fired muskets up the air
To show that victory was ours of right.
We met, had free discussion everywhere
(Except perhaps i' the Chambers) day and night.
We proved the poor should be employed, . . . that 's fair, —
And yet the rich not worked for anywise, —
Pay certified, yet payers abrogated, —
Full work secured, yet liabilities
To overwork excluded, — not one bated
Of all our holidays, that still, at twice
Or thrice a week, are moderately rated.
We proved that Austria was dislodged, or would
Or should be, and that Tuscany in arms
Should, would dislodge her, ending the old feud;
And yet, to leave our piazzas, shops, and farms,
For the simple sake of fighting, was not good —
We proved that also. 'Did we carry charms
Against being killed ourselves, that we should rush
On killing others? what, desert herewith
Our wives and mothers? — was that duty? tush!'
At which we shook the sword within the sheath
Like heroes — only louder; and the flush
Ran up the cheek to meet the future wreath.
Nay, what we proved, we shouted — how we shouted
(Especially the boys did), boldly planting
That tree of liberty, whose fruit is doubted,

Because the roots are not of nature's granting!
A tree of good and evil: none, without it,
Grow gods; alas and, with it, men are wanting!

O holy knowledge, holy liberty,
O holy rights of nations! If I speak
These bitter things against the jugglery
Of days that in your names proved blind and weak,
It is that tears are bitter. When we see
The brown skulls grin at death in churchyards bleak,
We do not cry 'This Yorick is too light,'
For death grows deathlier with that mouth he makes.
So with my mocking: bitter things I write
Because my soul is bitter for your sakes,
O freedom! O my Florence!

Men who might
Do greatly in a universe that breaks
And burns, must ever *know* before they do.
Courage and patience are but sacrifice;
And sacrifice is offered for and to
Something conceived of. Each man pays a price
For what himself counts precious, whether true
Or false the appreciation it implies.
But here,—no knowledge, no conception, nought!
Desire was absent, that provides great deeds
From out the greatness of prevenient thought:
And action, action, like a flame that needs
A steady breath and fuel, being caught
Up, like a burning reed from other reeds,
Flashed in the empty and uncertain air,
Then wavered, then went out. Behold, who blames
A crooked course, when not a goal is there
To round the fervid striving of the games?
An ignorance of means may minister
To greatness, but an igorance of aims
Makes it impossible to be great at all.
So with our Tuscans! Let none dare to say,
'Here virtue never can be national;
Here fortitude can never cut a way
Between the Austrian muskets, out of thrall:'
I tell you rather that, whoever may
Discern true ends here, shall grow pure enough
To love them, brave enough to strive for them,
And strong to reach them though the roads be rough:
That having learnt — by no mere apophthegm —
Not just the draping of a graceful stuff
About a statue, broidered at the hem, —
Not just the trilling on an opera-stage
Of 'libertà' to bravos — (a fair word,
Yet too allied to inarticulate rage
And breathless sobs, for singing, though the chord
Were deeper than they struck it) but the gauge
Of civil wants sustained and wrongs abhorred,
The serious sacred meaning and full use
Of freedom for a nation, — then, indeed,
Our Tuscans, underneath the bloody dews
Of some new morning, rising up agreed
And bold, will want no Saxon souls or thews
To sweep their piazzas clear of Austria's breed.

Alas, alas! it was not so this time.
Conviction was not, courage failed, and truth
Was something to be doubted of. The mime
Changed masks, because a mime. The tide as smooth
In running in as out, no sense of crime
Because no sense of virtue, — sudden ruth
Seized on the people: they would have again
Their good Grand-duke and leave Guerazzi, though
He took that tax from Florence. 'Much in vain
He takes it from the market-carts, we trow,
While urgent that no market-men remain,
But all march off and leave the spade and plough,
To die among the Lombards. Was it thus
The dear paternal Duke did? Live the Duke!'
At which the joy-bells multitudinous,
Swept by an opposite wind, as loudly shook.

Call back the mild archbishop to his house,
To bless the people with his frightened look, —
He shall not yet be hanged, you comprehend!
Seize on Guerazzi; guard him in full view,
Or else we stab him in the back, to end!
Rub out those chalked devices, set up new
The Duke's arms, doff your Phrygian caps, and mend
The pavement of the piazzas broke into
By barren poles of freedom: smooth the way
For the ducal carriage, lest his highness sigh
'Here trees of liberty grew yesterday!'
'Long live the Duke!' — how roared the cannonry,
How rocked the bell-towers, and through thickening spray
Of nosegays, wreaths, and kerchiefs tossed on high,
How marched the civic guard, the people still
Being good at shouts, especially the boys!
Alas, poor people, of an unfledged will
Most fitly expressed by such a callow voice!
Alas, still poorer Duke, incapable
Of being worthy even of so much noise!

You think he came back instantly, with thanks
And tears in his faint eyes, and hands extended
To stretch the franchise through their utmost ranks?
That having, like a father, apprehended,
He came to pardon fatherly those pranks
Played out and now in filial service ended? —
That some love-token, like a prince, he threw
To meet the people's love-call, in return?
Well, how he came I will relate to you;
And if your hearts should burn, why, hearts *must* burn,
To make the ashes which things old and new
Shall be washed clean in — as this Duke will learn.

From Casa Guidi windows gazing, then,
I saw and witness how the Duke came back.
The regular tramp of horse and tread of men
Did smite the silence like an anvil black
And sparkless. With her wide eyes at full strain,
Our Tuscan nurse exclaimed 'Alack, alack,
Signora! these shall be the Austrians.' 'Nay,
Be still,' I answered, 'do not wake the child!'
— For so, my two-months' baby sleeping lay
In milky dreams upon the bed and smiled,
And I thought 'He shall sleep on, while he may,
Through the world's baseness: not being yet defiled,
Why should he be disturbed by what is done?'
Then, gazing, I beheld the long-drawn street
Live out, from end to end, full in the sun,
With Austria's thousand; sword and bayonet,
Horse, foot, artillery, — cannons rolling on
Like blind slow storm-clouds gestant with the heat
Of undeveloped lightnings, each bestrode
By a single man, dust-white from head to heel,
Indifferent as the dreadful thing he rode,
Like a sculptured Fate serene and terrible.
As some smooth river which has overflowed
Will slow and silent down its current wheel
A loosened forest, all the pines erect,
So swept, in mute significance of storm,
The marshalled thousands; not an eye deflect
To left or right, to catch a novel form
Of Florence city adorned by architect
And carver, or of Beauties live and warm
Scared at the casements, — all, straightforward eyes
And faces, held as steadfast as their swords,
And cognizant of acts, not imageries.
The key, O Tuscans, too well fits the wards!
Ye asked for mimes, — these bring you tragedies:
For purple, — these shall wear it as your lords.
Ye played like children, — die like innocents.

Ye mimicked lightnings with a torch, — the crack
Of the actual bolt, your pastime circumvents.
Ye called up ghosts, believing they were slack
To follow any voice from Gilboa's tents, . . .
Here 's Samuel ! — and, so, Grand-dukes come back !

And yet, they are no prophets though they come:
That awful mantle, they are drawing close,
Shall be searched, one day, by the shafts of Doom
Through double folds now hoodwinking the brows.
Resuscitated monarchs disentomb
Grave-reptiles with them, in their new life-throes.
Let such beware. Behold, the people waits,
Like God: as He, in his serene of might,
So they, in their endurance of long straits.
Ye stamp no nation out, though day and night
Ye tread them with that absolute heel which grates
And grinds them flat from all attempted height.
You kill worms sooner with a garden-spade
Than you kill peoples: peoples will not die;
The tail curls stronger when you lop the head:
They writhe at every wound and multiply
And shudder into a heap of life that 's made
Thus vital from God's own vitality.
'T is hard to shrivel back a day of God's
Once fixed for judgment; 't is as hard to change
The peoples, when they rise beneath their loads
And heave them from their backs with violent wrench
To crush the oppressor: for that judgment-rod 's
The measure of this popular revenge.

Meanwhile, from Casa Guidi windows, we
Beheld the armament of Austria flow
Into the drowning heart of Tuscany:
And yet none wept, none cursed, or, if 't was so,
They wept and cursed in silence. Silently
Our noisy Tuscans watched the invading foe;
They had learnt silence. Pressed against the wall,
And grouped upon the church-steps opposite,
A few pale men and women stared at all.
God knows what they were feeling, with their white
Constrainèd faces, they, so prodigal
Of cry and gesture when the world goes right,
Or wrong indeed. But here was depth of wrong,
And here, still water; they were silent here;
And through that sentient silence, struck along
That measured tramp from which it stood out clear,
Distinct the sound and silence, like a gong
At midnight, each by the other awfuller, —
While every soldier in his cap displayed
A leaf of olive. Dusty, bitter thing !
Was such plucked at Novara, is it said ?

A cry is up in England, which doth ring
The hollow world through, that for ends of trade
And virtue and God's better worshipping,
We henceforth should exalt the name of Peace
And leave those rusty wars that eat the soul, —
Besides their clippings at our golden fleece.
I, too, have loved peace, and from bole to bole
Of immemorial undeciduous trees
Would write, as lovers use upon a scroll,
The holy name of Peace and set it high
Where none could pluck it down. On trees, I say, —
Not upon gibbets ! — With the greenery
Of dewy branches and the flowery May,
Sweet mediation betwixt earth and sky
Providing, for the shepherd's holiday.

Not upon gibbets! though the vulture leaves
The bones to quiet, which he first picked bare.
Not upon dungeons! though the wretch who grieves
And groans within less stirs the outer air
Than any little field-mouse stirs the sheaves.
Not upon chain-bolts! though the slave's despair
Has dulled his helpless miserable brain
And left him blank beneath the freeman's whip
To sing and laugh out idiocies of pain.
Nor yet on starving homes! where many a lip
Has sobbed itself asleep through curses vain.
I love no peace which is not fellowship
And which includes not mercy. I would have
Rather the raking of the guns across
The world, and shrieks against Heaven's architrave;
Rather the struggle in the slippery fosse
Of dying men and horses, and the wave
Blood-bubbling. . . . Enough said! — by Christ's own cross,
And by this faint heart of my womanhood,
Such things are better than a Peace that sits
Beside a hearth in self-commended mood,
And takes no thought how wind and rain by fits
Are howling out of doors against the good
Of the poor wanderer. What! your peace admits
Of outside anguish while it keeps at home?
I loathe to take its name upon my tongue.
'T is nowise peace: 't is treason, stiff with doom, —
'T is gagged despair and inarticulate wrong, —
Annihilated Poland, stifled Rome,
Dazed Naples, Hungary fainting 'neath the thong,
And Austria wearing a smooth olive-leaf
On her brute forehead, while her hoofs outpress
The life from these Italian souls, in brief.
O Lord of Peace, who art Lord of Righteousness,
Constrain the anguished worlds from sin and grief,
Pierce them with conscience, purge them with redress,
And give us peace which is no counterfeit!

But wherefore should we look out any more
From Casa Guidi windows? Shut them straight,
And let us sit down by the folded door,
And veil our saddened faces and, so, wait
What next the judgment-heavens make ready for.
I have grown too weary of these windows. Sights
Come thick enough and clear enough in thought,
Without the sunshine; souls have inner lights.
And since the Grand-duke has come back and brought
This army of the North which thus requites
His filial South, we leave him to be taught.
His South, too, has learnt something certainly,
Whereof the practice will bring profit soon;
And peradventure other eyes may see,
From Casa Guidi windows, what is done
Or undone. Whatsoever deeds they be,
Pope Pius will be glorified in none.
Record that gain, Mazzini! — it shall top
Some heights of sorrow. Peter's rock, so named,
Shall lure no vessel any more to drop
Among the breakers. Peter's chair is shamed
Like any vulgar throne the nations lop
To pieces for their firewood unreclaimed, —
And, when it burns too, we shall see as well
In Italy as elsewhere. Let it burn.
The cross, accounted still adorable,
Is Christ's cross only! — if the thief's would earn
Some stealthy genuflexions, we rebel;
And here the impenitent thief's has had its turn,

As God knows; and the people on their knees
Scoff and toss back the crosiers stretched like yokes
To press their heads down lower by degrees.
So Italy, by means of these last strokes,
Escapes the danger which preceded these,
Of leaving captured hands in cloven oaks, —
Of leaving very souls within the buckle
Whence bodies struggled outward, — of supposing
That freemen may like bondsmen kneel and truckle,
And then stand up as usual, without losing
An inch of stature.
Those whom she-wolves suckle
Will bite as wolves do in the grapple-closing
Of adverse interests. This at last is known
(Thank Pius for the lesson), that albeit
Among the popedom's hundred heads of stone
Which blink down on you from the roof's retreat
In Siena's tiger-striped cathedral, Joan
And Borgia 'mid their fellows you may greet,
A harlot and a devil, — you will see
Not a man, still less angel, grandly set
With open soul to render man more free.
The fishers are still thinking of the net,
And, if not thinking of the hook too, we
Are counted somewhat deeply in their debt;
But that 's a rare case — so, by hook and crook
They take the advantage, agonizing Christ
By rustier nails than those of Cedron's brook,
I' the people's body very cheaply priced, —
And quote high priesthood out of Holy book,
While buying death-fields with the sacrificed.

Priests, priests, — there 's no such name ! — God's own, except
Ye take most vainly. Through heaven's lifted gate
The priestly ephod in sole glory swept
When Christ ascended, entered in, and sate
(With victor face sublimely overwept)
At Deity's right hand, to mediate,
He alone, He for ever. On his breast
The Urim and the Thummim, fed with fire
From the full Godhead, flicker with the unrest
Of human pitiful heart-beats. Come up higher,
All Christians ! Levi's tribe is dispossest.
That solitary alb ye shall admire,
But not cast lots for. The last chrism, poured right,
Was on that Head, and poured for burial
And not for domination in men's sight.
What *are* these churches ? The old temple-wall
Doth overlook them juggling with the sleight
Of surplice, candlestick and altar-pall;
East church and west church, ay, north church and south,
Rome's church and England's, — let them all repent,
And make concordats 'twixt their soul and mouth,
Succeed Saint Paul by working at the tent,
Become infallible guides by speaking truth,
And excommunicate their pride that bent
And cramped the souls of men.
Why, even here
Priestcraft burns out, the twinèd linen blazes;
Not, like asbestos, to grow white and clear,
But all to perish ! — while the fire-smell raises
To life some swooning spirits who, last year,
Lost breath and heart in these church-stifled places.
Why, almost, through this Pius, we believed,
The priesthood could be an honest thing, he smiled
So saintly while our corn was being sheaved
For his own granaries ! Showing now defiled

His hireling hands, a better help's achieved
Than if they blessed us shepherd-like and mild.
False doctrine, strangled by its own amen,
Dies in the throat of all this nation. Who
Will speak a pope's name as they rise again?
What woman or what child will count him true?
What dreamer praise him with the voice or pen?
What man fight for him? — Pius takes his due.

Record that gain, Mazzini! — Yes, but first
Set down thy people's faults; set down the want
Of soul-conviction; set down aims dispersed,
And incoherent means, and valor scant
Because of scanty faith, and schisms accursed
That wrench these brother-hearts from covenant
With freedom and each other. Set down this,
And this, and see to overcome it when
The seasons bring the fruits thou wilt not miss
If wary. Let no cry of patriot men
Distract thee from the stern analysis
Of masses who cry only! keep thy ken
Clear as thy soul is virtuous. Heroes' blood
Splashed up against thy noble brow in Rome;
Let such not blind thee to an interlude
Which was not also holy, yet did come
'Twixt sacramental actions, — brotherhood
Despised even there, and something of the doom
Of Remus in the trenches. Listen now —
Rossi died silent near where Cæsar died.
He did not say 'My Brutus, is it thou?'
But Italy unquestioned testified
'*I* killed him! *I* am Brutus. — I avow.'
At which the whole world's laugh of scorn replied
'A poor maimed copy of Brutus!'
Too much like,
Indeed, to be so unlike! too unskilled
At Philippi and the honest battle-pike,
To be so skilful where a man is killed
Near Pompey's statue, and the daggers strike
At unawares i' the throat. Was thus fulfilled
An omen once of Michael Angelo? —
When Marcus Brutus he conceived complete,
And strove to hurl him out by blow on blow
Upon the marble, at Art's thunderheat,
Till haply (some pre-shadow rising slow
Of what his Italy would fancy meet
To be called Brutus) straight his plastic hand
Fell back before his prophet-soul, and left
A fragment, a maimed Brutus, — but more grand
Than this, so named at Rome, was!
'Let thy weft
Present one woof and warp, Mazzini! Stand
With no man hankering for a dagger's heft,
No, not for Italy! — nor stand apart,
No, not for the Republic! — from those pure
Brave men who hold the level of thy heart
In patriot truth, as lover and as doer,
Albeit they will not follow where thou art
As extreme theorist. Trust and distrust fewer;
And so bind strong and keep unstained the cause
Which (God's sign granted) war-trumps newly blown
Shall yet annunciate to the world's applause.

But now, the world is busy; it has grown
A Fair-going world. Imperial England draws
The flowing ends of the earth from Fez, Canton,
Delhi and Stockholm, Athens and Madrid,
The Russias and the vast Americas,
As if a queen drew in her robes amid

Her golden cincture, — isles, peninsulas,
Capes, continents, far inland countries hid
By jasper-sands and hills of chrysopras,
All trailing in their splendors through the door
Of the gorgeous Crystal Palace. Every nation,
To every other nation strange of yore,
Gives face to face the civic salutation,
And holds up in a proud right hand before
That congress the best work which she can fashion
By her best means. 'These corals, will you please
To match against your oaks? They grow as fast
Within my wilderness of purple seas.' —
'This diamond stared upon me as I passed
(As a live god's eye from a marble frieze)
Along a dark of diamonds. Is it classed?' —
'I wove these stuffs so subtly that the gold
Swims to the surface of the silk like cream
And curdles to fair patterns. Ye behold!' —
'These delicatest muslins rather seem
Than be, you think? Nay, touch them and be bold,
Though such veiled Chakhi's face in Hafiz' dream.' —
'These carpets — you walk slow on them like kings,
Inaudible like spirits, while your foot
Dips deep in velvet roses and such things.' —
'Even Apollonius might commend this flute:
The music, winding through the stops, upsprings
To make the player very rich: compute!'
'Here's goblet-glass, to take in with your wine
The very sun its grapes were ripened under:
Drink light and juice together, and each fine.' —
'This model of a steamship moves your wonder?
You should behold it crushing down the brine
Like a blind Jove who feels his way with thunder.' —
'Here's sculpture! Ah, *we* live too! why not throw
Our life into our marbles? Art has place
For other artists after Angelo.' —
'I tried to paint out here a natural face;
For nature includes Raffael, as we know,
Not Raffael nature. Will it help my case?' —
'Methinks you will not match this steel of ours!' —
'Nor you this porcelain! One might dream the clay
Retained in it the larvæ of the flowers,
They bud so, round the cup, the old Spring-way.' —
'Nor you these carven woods, where birds in bowers
With twisting snakes and climbing cupids, play.'

O Magi of the east and of the west,
Your incense, gold and myrrh are excellent! —
What gifts for Christ, then, bring ye with the rest?
Your hands have worked well: is your courage spent
In handwork only? Have you nothing best,
Which generous souls may perfect and present,
And He shall thank the givers for? no light
Of teaching, liberal nations, for the poor
Who sit in darkness when it is not night?
No cure for wicked children? Christ, — no cure!
No help for women sobbing out of sight
Because men made the laws? no brothel-lure
Burnt out by popular lightnings? Hast thou found
No remedy, my England, for such woes?
No outlet, Austria, for the scourged and bound,
No entrance for the exiled? no repose,
Russia, for knouted Poles worked underground,
And gentle ladies bleached among the snows?
No mercy for the slave, America?
No hope for Rome, free France, chivalric France?

Alas, great nations have great shames, I say.
No pity, O world, no tender utterance
Of benediction, and prayers stretched this way
For poor Italia, baffled by mischance?
O gracious nations, give some ear to me!
You all go to your Fair, and I am one
Who at the roadside of humanity
Beseech your alms, — God's justice to be done.
So, prosper!

In the name of Italy,
Meantime, her patriot Dead have benison.
They only have done well; and, what they did
Being perfect, it shall triumph. Let them slumber:
No king of Egypt in a pyramid
Is safer from oblivion, though he number
Full seventy cerements for a coverlid.
These Dead be seeds of life, and shall encumber
The sad heart of the land until it loose
The clammy clods and let out the Spring-growth
In beatific green through every bruise.
The tyrant should take heed to what he doth,
Since every victim-carrion turns to use,
And drives a chariot, like a god made wroth,
Against each piled injustice. Ay, the least,
Dead for Italia, not in vain has died;
Though many vainly, ere life's struggle ceased,
To mad dissimilar ends have swerved aside;
Each grave her nationality has pieced
By its own majestic breadth, and fortified
And pinned it deeper to the soil. Forlorn
Of thanks be, therefore, no one of these graves!
Not Hers, — who, at her husband's side, in scorn,
Outfaced the whistling shot and hissing waves,
Until she felt her little babe unborn
Recoil, within her, from the violent staves
And bloodhounds of the world, — at which, her life
Dropt inwards from her eyes and followed it
Beyond the hunters. Garibaldi's wife
And child died so. And now, the seaweeds fit
Her body, like a proper shroud and coif,
And murmurously the ebbing waters grit
The little pebbles while she lies interred
In the sea-sand. Perhaps, ere dying thus,
She looked up in his face (which never stirred
From its clenched anguish) as to make excuse
For leaving him for his, if so she erred.
He well remembers that she could not choose.
A memorable grave! Another is
At Genoa. There, a king may fitly lie,
Who, bursting that heroic heart of his
At lost Novara, that he could not die
(Though thrice into the cannon's eyes for this
He plunged his shuddering steed, and felt the sky
Reel back between the fire-shocks), stripped away
The ancestral ermine ere the smoke had cleared,
And, naked to the soul, that none might say
His kingship covered what was base and bleared
With treason, went out straight an exile, yea,
An exiled patriot. Let him be revered.

Yea, verily, Charles Albert has died well;
And if he lived not all so, as one spoke,
The sin pass softly with the passing-bell:
For he was shriven, I think, in cannon-smoke,
And, taking off his crown, made visible
A hero's forehead. Shaking Austria's yoke
He shattered his own hand and heart. 'So best,'
His last words were upon his lonely bed,
'I do not end like popes and dukes at least —
Thank God for it.' And now that he is dead,
Admitting it is proved and manifest
That he was worthy, with a discrowned head,
To measure heights with patriots, let them stand
Beside the man in his Oporto shroud,
And each vouchsafe to take him by the hand,

And kiss him on the cheek, and say aloud, —
'Thou, too, hast suffered for our native land!
My brother, thou art one of us! be proud.'

Still, graves, when Italy is talked upon.
Still, still, the patriot's tomb, the stranger's hate.
Still Niobe! still fainting in the sun,
By whose most dazzling arrows violate
Her beauteous offspring perished! has she won
Nothing but garlands for the graves, from Fate?
Nothing but death-songs? — Yes, be it understood
Life throbs in noble Piedmont! while the feet
Of Rome's clay image, dabbled soft in blood,
Grow flat with dissolution and, as meet,
Will soon be shovelled off like other mud,
To leave the passage free in church and street.
And I, who first took hope up in this song,
Because a child was singing one . . . behold,
The hope and omen were not, haply, wrong!
Poets are soothsayers still, like those of old
Who studied flights of doves; and creatures young
And tender, mighty meanings may unfold.

The sun strikes, through the windows, up the floor;
Stand out in it, my own young Florentine,
Not two years old, and let me see thee more!
It grows along thy amber curls, to shine
Brighter than elsewhere. Now, look straight before,
And fix thy brave blue English eyes on mine,
And from my soul, which fronts the future so,
With unabashed and unabated gaze,
Teach me to hope for, what the angels know
When they smile clear as thou dost. Down God's ways
With just alighted feet, between the snow
And snowdrops, where a little lamb may graze,
Thou hast no fear, my lamb, about the road,
Albeit in our vainglory we assume
That, less than we have, thou hast learnt of God.
Stand out, my blue-eyed prophet! — thou, to whom
The earliest world-day light that ever flowed,
Through Casa Guidi Windows chanced to come!
Now shake the glittering nimbus of thy hair,
And be God's witness that the elemental
New springs of life are gushing everywhere
To cleanse the watercourses, and prevent all
Concrete obstructions which infest the air!
That earth 's alive, and gentle or ungentle
Motions within her, signify but growth! —
The ground swells greenest o'er the laboring moles.

Howe'er the uneasy world is vexed and wroth,
Young children, lifted high on parent souls,
Look round them with a smile upon the mouth,
And take for music every bell that tolls;
(Who said we should be better if like these?)
But *we* sit murmuring for the future though
Posterity is smiling on our knees,
Convicting us of folly. Let us go —
We will trust God. The blank interstices
Men take for ruins, He will build into
With pillared marbles rare, or knit across
With generous arches, till the fane 's complete.
This world has no perdition, if some loss.

Such cheer I gather from thy smiling, Sweet!
The self-same cherub-faces which em boss
The Vail, lean inward to the Mercy-seat.

AURORA LEIGH

A POEM IN NINE BOOKS

From the time when Mrs. Browning dashed off the greater part of 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' in response to a demand from her publisher for 'more copy,' she had cherished the design of writing a complete poetical romance, of which the scene should be laid in the present time amid the seemingly unromantic surroundings of modern society. When, therefore, she had become a little wonted to married life in Italy and had delivered her soul of the first ardent though fluctuating emotions excited by the earlier stages of the Italian struggle for independence, she set about the execution of her previous project. The narrative poem of *Aurora Leigh*, her most sustained and considerable if not her most symmetrical and beautiful work, was begun in Florence, or at the Baths of Lucca, in the early fifties, and continued during the summers of 1855 and 1856, which the Brownings passed in England, and the intervening winter, when they were living in Paris, in a small apartment on the Rue du Colisée. It was finally completed in England, in the London house of John Kenyon, Mrs. Browning's generous cousin, and the faithful friend of both poets, who lived only a few weeks after *Aurora Leigh* had received its dedication to him, in October, 1856. The first edition appeared at the Christmas holidays of that year, and bears the imprint London: Chapman & Hall, 1857.

DEDICATION

TO

JOHN KENYON, ESQ.

The words 'cousin' and 'friend' are constantly recurring in this poem, the last pages of which have been finished under the hospitality of your roof, my own dearest cousin and friend; — cousin and friend, in a sense of less equality and greater disinterestedness than 'Romney''s.

Ending, therefore, and preparing once more to quit England, I venture to leave in your hands this book, the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered; that as, through my various efforts in Literature and steps in life, you have believed in me, borne with me, and been generous to me, far beyond the common uses of mere relationship or sympathy of mind, so you may kindly accept, in sight of the public, this poor sign of esteem, gratitude, and affection from — Your unforgetting

E. B. B.

39 DEVONSHIRE PLACE: *October* 17, 1856.

AURORA LEIGH

FIRST BOOK

OF writing many books there is no end;
And I who have written much in prose and verse
For others' uses, will write now for mine, —
Will write my story for my better self,
As when you paint your portrait for a friend,
Who keeps it in a drawer and looks at it
Long after he has ceased to love you, just
To hold together what he was and is.

I, writing thus, am still what men call young;
I have not so far left the coasts of life
To travel inland, that I cannot hear
That murmur of the outer Infinite
Which unweaned babies smile at in their sleep
When wondered at for smiling; not so far,
But still I catch my mother at her post
Beside the nursery door, with finger up,
'Hush, hush — here 's too much noise!' while her sweet eyes
Leap forward, taking part against her word
In the child's riot. Still I sit and feel
My father's slow hand, when she had left us both,
Stroke out my childish curls across his knee,
And hear Assunta's daily jest (she knew
He liked it better than a better jest)
Inquire how many golden scudi went
To make such ringlets. O my father's hand,
Stroke heavily, heavily the poor hair down,
Draw, press the child's head closer to thy knee!
I 'm still too young, too young, to sit alone.

I write. My mother was a Florentine,
Whose rare blue eyes were shut from seeing me
When scarcely I was four years old, my life
A poor spark snatched up from a failing lamp
Which went out therefore. She was weak and frail;
She could not bear the joy of giving life,
The mother's rapture slew her. If her kiss
Had left a longer weight upon my lips
It might have steadied the uneasy breath,
And reconciled and fraternized my soul
With the new order. As it was, indeed,
I felt a mother-want about the world,
And still went seeking, like a bleating lamb
Left out at night in shutting up the fold, —
As restless as a nest-deserted bird
Grown chill through something being away, though what
It knows not. I, Aurora Leigh, was born
To make my father sadder, and myself
Not overjoyous, truly. Women know
The way to rear up children (to be just),
They know a simple, merry, tender knack
Of tying sashes, fitting baby-shoes,
And stringing pretty words that make no sense,
And kissing full sense into empty words,
Which things are corals to cut life upon,
Although such trifles: children learn by such,
Love's holy earnest in a pretty play
And get not over-early solemnized,
But seeing, as in a rose-bush, Love's Divine
Which burns and hurts not, — not a single bloom, —
Become aware and unafraid of Love.
Such good do mothers. Fathers love as well
— Mine did, I know, — but still with heavier brains,
And wills more consciously responsible,
And not as wisely, since less foolishly;
So mothers have God's license to be missed.

My father was an austere Englishman,
Who, after a dry lifetime spent at home
In college-learning, law, and parish talk,
Was flooded with a passion unaware,
His whole provisioned and complacent past
Drowned out from him that moment. As he stood
In Florence, where he had come to spend a month
And note the secret of Da Vinci's drains,
He musing somewhat absently perhaps
Some English question . . . whether men should pay
The unpopular but necessary tax
With left or right hand — in the alien sun
In that great square of the Santissima
There drifted past him (scarcely marked enough
To move his comfortable island scorn)
A train of priestly banners, cross and psalm,
The white-veiled rose-crowned maidens holding up
Tall tapers, weighty for such wrists, aslant
To the blue luminous tremor of the air,
And letting drop the white wax as they went
To eat the bishop's wafer at the church;
From which long trail of chanting priests and girls,
A face flashed like a cymbal on his face
And shook with silent clangor brain and heart,
Transfiguring him to music. Thus, even thus,
He too received his sacramental gift
With eucharistic meanings; for he loved.

And thus beloved, she died. I 've heard it said
That but to see him in the first surprise
Of widower and father, nursing me,
Unmothered little child of four years old,
His large man's hands afraid to touch my curls,
As if the gold would tarnish, — his grave lips
Contriving such a miserable smile
As if he knew needs must, or I should die,
And yet 't was hard, — would almost make the stones
Cry out for pity. There 's a verse he set
In Santa Croce to her memory, —
'Weep for an infant too young to weep much
When death removed this mother' — stops the mirth
To-day on women's faces when they walk
With rosy children hanging on their gowns

Under the cloister to escape the sun
That scorches in the piazza. After which
He left our Florence and made haste to hide
Himself, his prattling child, and silent grief,
Among the mountains above Pelago;
Because unmothered babes, he thought, had need
Of mother nature more than others use,
And Pan's white goats, with udders warm and full
Of mystic contemplations, come to feed
Poor milkless lips of orphans like his own —
Such scholar-scraps he talked, I 've heard from friends,
For even prosaic men who wear grief long
Will get to wear it as a hat aside
With a flower stuck in 't. Father, then, and child,
We lived among the mountains many years,
God's silence on the outside of the house,
And we who did not speak too loud within,
And old Assunta to make up the fire,
Crossing herself whene'er a sudden flame
Which lightened from the firewood, made alive
That picture of my mother on the wall.

The painter drew it after she was dead,
And when the face was finished, throat and hands,
Her cameriera carried him, in hate
Of the English-fashioned shroud, the last brocade
She dressed in at the Pitti; 'he should paint
No sadder thing than that,' she swore, 'to wrong
Her poor signora.' Therefore very strange
The effect was. I, a little child, would crouch
For hours upon the floor with knees drawn up,
And gaze across them, half in terror, half
In adoration, at the picture there, —
That swan-like supernatural white life
Just sailing upward from the red stiff silk
Which seemed to have no part in it nor power
To keep it from quite breaking out of bounds.
For hours I sat and stared. Assunta's awe
And my poor father's melancholy eyes
Still pointed that way. That way went my thoughts
When wandering beyond sight. And as I grew
In years, I mixed, confused, unconsciously,
Whatever I last read or heard or dreamed,
Abhorrent, admirable, beautiful,
Pathetical, or ghastly, or grotesque,
With still that face . . . which did not therefore change,
But kept the mystic level of all forms,
Hates, fears, and admirations, was by turns
Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and sprite,
A dauntless Muse who eyes a dreadful Fate,
A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,
A still Medusa with mild milky brows
All curdled and all clothed upon with snakes
Whose slime falls fast as sweat will; or anon
Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with swords
Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her first
Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and blinked
And shuddering wriggled down to the unclean;
Or my own mother, leaving her last smile
In her last kiss upon the baby-mouth
My father pushed down on the bed for that, —
Or my dead mother, without smile or kiss,
Buried at Florence. All which images,
Concentred on the picture, glassed themselves
Before my meditative childhood, as
The incoherencies of change and death
Are represented fully, mixed and merged,
In the smooth fair mystery of perpetual Life.
And while I stared away my childish wits
Upon my mother's picture (ah, poor child !),
My father, who through love had suddenly
Thrown off the old conventions, broken loose
From chin-bands of the soul, like Lazarus,
Yet had no time to learn to talk and walk
Or grow anew familiar with the sun, —

Who had reached to freedom, not to action, lived,
But lived as one entranced, with thoughts, not aims, —
Whom love had unmade from a common man,
But not completed to an uncommon man, —
My father taught me what he had learnt the best
Before he died and left me, — grief and love.
And, seeing we had books among the hills,
Strong words of counselling souls confederate
With vocal pines and waters, — out of books
He taught me all the ignorance of men,
And how God laughs in heaven when any man
Says 'Here I'm learned; this I understand;
In that, I am never caught at fault or doubt.'
He sent the schools to school, demonstrating
A fool will pass for such through one mistake,
While a philosopher will pass for such,
Through said mistakes being ventured in the gross
And heaped up to a system.
I am like,
They tell me, my dear father. Broader brows
Howbeit, upon a slenderer undergrowth
Of delicate features, — paler, near as grave;
But then my mother's smile breaks up the whole,
And makes it better sometimes than itself.
So, nine full years, our days were hid with God
Among his mountains: I was just thirteen,
Still growing like the plants from unseen roots
In tongue-tied Springs, — and suddenly awoke
To full life and life's needs and agonies
With an intense, strong, struggling heart beside
A stone-dead father. Life, struck sharp on death,
Makes awful lightning. His last word was 'Love —'
'Love, my child, love, love!' — (then he had done with grief)
'Love, my child.' Ere I answered he was gone,
And none was left to love in all the world.

There, ended childhood. What succeeded next
I recollect as, after fevers, men
Thread back the passage of delirium,
Missing the turn still, baffled by the door;
Smooth endless days, notched here and there with knives,
A weary, wormy darkness, spurred i' the flank
With flame, that it should eat and end itself
Like some tormented scorpion. Then at last
I do remember clearly how there came
A stranger with authority, not right
(I thought not), who commanded, caught me up
From old Assunta's neck; how, with a shriek,
She let me go, — while I, with ears too full
Of my father's silence to shriek back a word,
In all a child's astonishment at grief
Stared at the wharf-edge where she stood and moaned,
My poor Assunta, where she stood and moaned!
The white walls, the blue hills, my Italy,
Drawn backward from the shuddering steamer-deck,
Like one in anger drawing back her skirts
Which suppliants catch at. Then the bitter sea
Inexorably pushed between us both
And, sweeping up the ship with my despair,
Threw us out as a pasture to the stars.

Ten nights and days we voyaged on the deep;
Ten nights and days without the common face
Of any day or night; the moon and sun
Cut off from the green reconciling earth,
To starve into a blind ferocity
And glare unnatural; the very sky

(Dropping its bell-net down upon the sea,
As if no human heart should 'scape alive)
Bedraggled with the desolating salt,
Until it seemed no more that holy heaven
To which my father went. All new and strange;
The universe turned stranger, for a child.

Then, land! — then, England! oh, the frosty cliffs
Looked cold upon me. Could I find a home
Among those mean red houses through the fog?
And when I heard my father's language first
From alien lips which had no kiss for mine
I wept aloud, then laughed, then wept, then wept,
And some one near me said the child was mad
Through much sea-sickness. The train swept us on:
Was this my father's England? the great isle?
The ground seemed cut up from the fellowship
Of verdure, field from field, as man from man;
The skies themselves looked low and positive,
As almost you could touch them with a hand,
And dared to do it they were so far off
From God's celestial crystals; all things blurred
And dull and vague. Did Shakespeare and his mates
Absorb the light here? — not a hill or stone
With heart to strike a radiant color up
Or active outline on the indifferent air.

I think I see my father's sister stand
Upon the hall-step of her country-house
To give me welcome. She stood straight and calm,
Her somewhat narrow forehead braided tight
As if for taming accidental thoughts
From possible pulses; brown hair pricked with gray
By frigid use of life (she was not old,
Although my father's elder by a year),
A nose drawn sharply, yet in delicate lines;
A close mild mouth, a little soured about
The ends, through speaking unrequited loves
Or peradventure niggardly half-truths;
Eyes of no color, — once they might have smiled,
But never, never have forgot themselves
In smiling; cheeks, in which was yet a rose
Of perished summers, like a rose in a book,
Kept more for ruth than pleasure, — if past bloom,
Past fading also.
She had lived, we 'll say,
A harmless life, she called a virtuous life,
A quiet life, which was not life at all
(But that, she had not lived enough to know),
Between the vicar and the county squires,
The lord-lieutenant looking down sometimes
From the empyrean to assure their souls
Against chance vulgarisms, and, in the abyss,
The apothecary, looked on once a year
To prove their soundness of humility.
The poor-club exercised her Christian gifts
Of knitting stockings, stitching petticoats,
Because we are of one flesh, after all,
And need one flannel (with a proper sense
Of difference in the quality) — and still
The book-club, guarded from your modern trick
Of shaking dangerous questions from the crease,
Preserved her intellectual. She had lived
A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,
Accounting that to leap from perch to perch
Was act and joy enough for any bird.
Dear heaven, how silly are the things that live
In thickets, and eat berries!
I, alas,
A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought to her cage,
And she was there to meet me. Very kind.
Bring the clean water, give out the fresh seed.

She stood upon the steps to welcome me,
Calm, in black garb. I clung about her neck, —
Young babes, who catch at every shred of wool
To draw the new light closer, catch and cling
Less blindly. In my ears my father's word
Hummed ignorantly, as the sea in shells,
'Love, love, my child.' She, black there with my grief,
Might feel my love — she was his sister once —
I clung to her. A moment she seemed moved,
Kissed me with cold lips, suffered me to cling,
And drew me feebly through the hall into
The room she sat in.
        There, with some strange spasm
Of pain and passion, she wrung loose my hands
Imperiously, and held me at arm's length,
And with two gray-steel naked-bladed eyes
Searched through my face, — ay, stabbed it through and through,
Through brows and cheeks and chin, as if to find
A wicked murderer in my innocent face,
If not here, there perhaps. Then, drawing breath,
She struggled for her ordinary calm —
And missed it rather, — told me not to shrink,
As if she had told me not to lie or swear, —
'She loved my father and would love me too
As long as I deserved it.' Very kind.

I understood her meaning afterward;
She thought to find my mother in my face,
And questioned it for that. For she, my aunt,
Had loved my father truly, as she could,
And hated, with the gall of gentle souls,
My Tuscan mother who had fooled away
A wise man from wise courses, a good man
From obvious duties, and, depriving her,
His sister, of the household precedence,
Had wronged his tenants, robbed his native land,
And made him mad, alike by life and death,
In love and sorrow. She had pored for years
What sort of woman could be suitable
To her sort of hate, to entertain it with,
And so, her very curiosity
Became hate too, and all the idealism
She ever used in life was used for hate,
Till hate, so nourished, did exceed at last
The love from which it grew, in strength and heat,
And wrinkled her smooth conscience with a sense
Of disputable virtue (say not, sin)
When Christian doctrine was enforced at church.

And thus my father's sister was to me
My mother's hater. From that day she did
Her duty to me (I appreciate it
In her own word as spoken to herself),
Her duty, in large measure, well pressed out,
But measured always. She was generous, bland,
More courteous than was tender, gave me still
The first place, — as if fearful that God's saints
Would look down suddenly and say 'Herein
You missed a point, I think, through lack of love.'
Alas, a mother never is afraid
Of speaking angerly to any child,
Since love, she knows, is justified of love.

And I, I was a good child on the whole,
A meek and manageable child. Why not?
I did not live, to have the faults of life:
There seemed more true life in my father's grave
Than in all England. Since *that* threw me off
Who fain would cleave (his latest will, they say,
Consigned me to his land), I only thought
Of lying quiet there where I was thrown

Like sea-weed on the rocks, and suffering her
To prick me to a pattern with her pin,
Fibre from fibre, delicate leaf from leaf,
And dry out from my drowned anatomy
The last sea-salt left in me.
                                        So it was.
I broke the copious curls upon my head
In braids, because she liked smooth-ordered hair.
I left off saying my sweet Tuscan words
Which still at any stirring of the heart
Came up to float across the English phrase
As lilies (*Bene* or *Che che*), because
She liked my father's child to speak his tongue.
I learnt the collects and the catechism,
The creeds, from Athanasius back to Nice,
The Articles, the Tracts *against* the times
(By no means Buonaventure's 'Prick of Love'),
And various popular synopses of
Inhuman doctrines never taught by John,
Because she liked instructed piety.
I learnt my complement of classic French
(Kept pure of Balzac and neologism)
And German also, since she liked a range
Of liberal education, — tongues, not books.
I learnt a little algebra, a little
Of the mathematics, — brushed with extreme flounce
The circle of the sciences, because
She misliked women who are frivolous.
I learnt the royal genealogies
Of Oviedo, the internal laws
Of the Burmese empire, — by how many feet
Mount Chimborazo outsoars Teneriffe,
What navigable river joins itself
To Lara, and what census of the year five
Was taken at Klagenfurt, — because she liked
A general insight into useful facts.
I learnt much music, — such as would have been
As quite impossible in Johnson's day
As still it might be wished — fine sleights of hand
And unimagined fingering, shuffling off
The hearer's soul through hurricanes of notes
To a noisy Tophet; and I drew . . . costumes
From French engravings, nereids neatly draped
(With smirks of simmering godship): I washed in
Landscapes from nature (rather say, washed out).
I danced the polka and Cellarius,
Spun glass, stuffed birds, and modelled flowers in wax,
Because she liked accomplishments in girls.
I read a score of books on womanhood
To prove, if women do not think at all,
They may teach thinking (to a maiden aunt
Or else the author), — books that boldly assert
Their right of comprehending husband's talk
When not too deep, and even of answering
With pretty 'may it please you,' or 'so it is,' —
Their rapid insight and fine aptitude,
Particular worth and general missionariness,
As long as they keep quiet by the fire
And never say 'no' when the world says 'ay,'
For that is fatal, — their angelic reach
Of virtue, chiefly used to sit and darn,
And fatten household sinners, — their, in brief,
Potential faculty in everything
Of abdicating power in it: she owned
She liked a woman to be womanly,
And English women, she thanked God and sighed
(Some people always sigh in thanking God),
Were models to the universe. And last
I learnt cross-stitch, because she did not like
To see me wear the night with empty hands
A-doing nothing. So, my shepherdess
Was something after all (the pastoral saints
Be praised for 't), leaning lovelorn with pink eyes
To match her shoes, when I mistook the silks;
Her head uncrushed by that round weight of hat
So strangely similar to the tortoise shell
Which slew the tragic poet.
                                        By the way,
The works of women are symbolical.

We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,
Producing what? A pair of slippers, sir,
To put on when you 're weary — or a stool
To stumble over and vex you . . . 'curse that stool!'
Or else at best, a cushion, where you lean
And sleep, and dream of something we are not
But would be for your sake. Alas, alas!
This hurts most, this — that, after all, we are paid
The worth of our work, perhaps.
In looking down
Those years of education (to return)
I wonder if Brinvilliers suffered more
In the water-torture . . . flood succeeding flood
To drench the incapable throat and split the veins . . .
Than I did. Certain of your feebler souls
Go out in such a process; many pine
To a sick, inodorous light; my own endured:
I had relations in the Unseen, and drew
The elemental nutriment and heat
From nature, as earth feels the sun at nights,
Or as a babe sucks surely in the dark.
I kept the life thrust on me, on the outside
Of the inner life with all its ample room
For heart and lungs, for will and intellect,
Inviolable by conventions. God,
I thank thee for that grace of thine!
At first
I felt no life which was not patience, — did
The thing she bade me, without heed to a thing
Beyond it, sat in just the chair she placed,
With back against the window, to exclude
The sight of the great lime-tree on the lawn,
Which seemed to have come on purpose from the woods
To bring the house a message, — ay, and walked
Demurely in her carpeted low rooms,
As if I should not, hearkening my own steps,
Misdoubt I was alive. I read her books,
Was civil to her cousin, Romney Leigh,
Gave ear to her vicar, tea to her visitors,
And heard them whisper, when I changed a cup
(I blushed for joy at that), — 'The Italian child,
For all her blue eyes and her quiet ways,
Thrives ill in England: she is paler yet
Than when we came the last time; she will die.'

'Will die.' My cousin, Romney Leigh, blushed too,
With sudden anger, and approaching me
Said low between his teeth, 'You 're wicked now?
You wish to die and leave the world a-dusk
For others, with your naughty light blown out?'
I looked into his face defyingly;
He might have known that, being what I was,
'T was natural to like to get away
As far as dead folk can: and then indeed
Some people make no trouble when they die.
He turned and went abruptly, slammed the door,
And shut his dog out.
Romney, Romney Leigh.
I have not named my cousin hitherto,
And yet I used him as a sort of friend;
My elder by few years, but cold and shy
And absent . . . tender, when he thought of it,
Which scarcely was imperative, grave betimes,
As well as early master of Leigh Hall,
Whereof the nightmare sat upon his youth,
Repressing all its seasonable delights,
And agonizing with a ghastly sense
Of universal hideous want and wrong
To incriminate possession. When he came
From college to the country, very oft
He crossed the hill on visits to my aunt,
With gifts of blue grapes from the hothouses,
A book in one hand, — mere statistics (if
I chanced to lift the cover), count of all
The goats whose beards grow sprouting down toward hell
Against God's separative judgment-hour.
And she, she almost loved him, — even allowed
That sometimes he should seem to sigh my way;

It made him easier to be pitiful,
And sighing was his gift. So, undisturbed,
At whiles she let him shut my music up
And push my needles down, and lead me out
To see in that south angle of the house
The figs grow black as if by a Tuscan rock,
On some light pretext. She would turn her head
At other moments, go to fetch a thing,
And leave me breath enough to speak with him,
For his sake; it was simple.
Sometimes too
He would have saved me utterly, it seemed,
He stood and looked so.
Once, he stood so near,
He dropped a sudden hand upon my head
Bent down on woman's work, as soft as rain —
But then I rose and shook it off as fire,
The stranger's touch that took my father's place
Yet dared seem soft.
I used him for a friend
Before I ever knew him for a friend.
'T was better, 't was worse also, afterward:
We came so close, we saw our differences
Too intimately. Always Romney Leigh
Was looking for the worms, I for the gods.
A godlike nature his; the gods look down,
Incurious of themselves; and certainly
'T is well I should remember, how, those days,
I was a worm too, and he looked on me.

A little by his act perhaps, yet more
By something in me, surely not my will,
I did not die. But slowly, as one in swoon,
To whom life creeps back in the form of death,
With a sense of separation, a blind pain
Of blank obstruction, and a roar i' the ears
Of visionary chariots which retreat
As earth grows clearer . . . slowly, by degrees,
I woke, rose up . . . where was I? in the world;
For uses therefore I must count worth while.

I had a little chamber in the house,
As green as any privet-hedge a bird
Might choose to build in, though the nest itself
Could show but dead-brown sticks and straws; the walls
Were green, the carpet was pure green, the straight
Small bed was curtained greenly, and the folds
Hung green about the window which let in
The out-door world with all its greenery.
You could not push your head out and escape
A dash of dawn-dew from the honeysuckle,
But so you were baptized into the grace
And privilege of seeing. . . .
First, the lime
(I had enough there, of the lime, be sure, —
My morning-dream was often hummed away
By the bees in it); past the lime, the lawn,
Which, after sweeping broadly round the house,
Went trickling through the shrubberies in a stream
Of tender turf, and wore and lost itself
Among the acacias, over which you saw
The irregular line of elms by the deep lane
Which stopped the grounds and dammed the overflow
Of arbutus and laurel. Out of sight
The lane was; sunk so deep, no foreign tramp
Nor drover of wild ponies out of Wales
Could guess if lady's hall or tenant's lodge
Dispensed such odors, — though his stick well-crooked
Might reach the lowest trail of blossoming briar
Which dipped upon the wall. Behind the elms,
And through their tops, you saw the folded hills
Striped up and down with hedges (burly oaks
Projecting from the line to show themselves),
Through which my cousin Romney's chimneys smoked
As still as when a silent mouth in frost
Breathes, showing where the woodlands hid Leigh Hall;
While, far above, a jut of table-land,

A promontory without water, stretched, —
You could not catch it if the days were thick,
Or took it for a cloud; but, otherwise,
The vigorous sun would catch it up at eve
And use it for an anvil till he had filled
The shelves of heaven with burning thunderbolts,
Protesting against night and darkness: — then,
When all his setting trouble was resolved
To a trance of passive glory, you might see
In apparition on the golden sky
(Alas, my Giotto's background!) the sheep run
Along the fine clear outline, small as mice
That run along a witch's scarlet thread.

Not a grand nature. Not my chestnut-woods
Of Vallombrosa, cleaving by the spurs
To the precipices. Not my headlong leaps
Of waters, that cry out for joy or fear
In leaping through the palpitating pines,
Like a white soul tossed out to eternity
With thrills of time upon it. Not indeed
My multitudinous mountains, sitting in
The magic circle, with the mutual touch
Electric, panting from their full deep hearts
Beneath the influent heavens, and waiting for
Communion and commission. Italy
Is one thing, England one.
On English ground
You understand the letter, — ere the fall
How Adam lived in a garden. All the fields
Are tied up fast with hedges, nosegay like;
The hills are crumpled plains, the plains parterres,
The trees, round, woolly, ready to be clipped,
And if you seek for any wilderness
You find, at best, a park. A nature tamed
And grown domestic like a barn-door fowl,
Which does not awe you with its claws and beak,
Nor tempt you to an eyrie too high up,
But which, in cackling, sets you thinking of
Your eggs to-morrow at breakfast, in the pause
Of finer meditation.
Rather say,
A sweet familiar nature, stealing in
As a dog might, or child, to touch your hand
Or pluck your gown, and humbly mind you so
Of presence and affection, excellent
For inner uses, from the things without.

I could not be unthankful, I who was
Entreated thus and holpen. In the room
I speak of, ere the house was well awake,
And also after it was well asleep,
I sat alone, and drew the blessing in
Of all that nature. With a gradual step,
A stir among the leaves, a breath, a ray,
It came in softly, while the angels made
A place for it beside me. The moon came,
And swept my chamber clean of foolish thoughts.
The sun came, saying, 'Shall I lift this light
Against the lime-tree, and you will not look?
I make the birds sing — listen! but, for you,
God never hears your voice, excepting when
You lie upon the bed at nights and weep.'

Then, something moved me. Then, I wakened up
More slowly than I verily write now,
But wholly, at last, I wakened, opened wide
The window and my soul, and let the airs
And out-door sights sweep gradual gospels in,
Regenerating what I was. O Life,
How oft we throw it off and think, — 'Enough,
Enough of life in so much! — here's a cause
For rupture; — herein we must break with Life,
Or be ourselves unworthy; here we are wronged,
Maimed, spoiled for aspiration: farewell, Life!'
And so, as froward babes, we hide our eyes
And think all ended. — Then, Life calls to us
In some transformed, apocalyptic voice,
Above us, or below us, or around:

Perhaps we name it Nature's voice, or Love's,
Tricking ourselves, because we are more ashamed
To own our compensations than our griefs:
Still, Life's voice! — still, we make our peace with Life.

And I, so young then, was not sullen. Soon
I used to get up early, just to sit
And watch the morning quicken in the gray,
And hear the silence open like a flower
Leaf after leaf, — and stroke with listless hand
The woodbine through the window, till at last
I came to do it with a sort of love,
At foolish unaware: whereat I smiled, —
A melancholy smile, to catch myself
Smiling for joy.
Capacity for joy
Admits temptation. It seemed, next, worth while
To dodge the sharp sword set against my life;
To slip down stairs through all the sleepy house,
As mute as any dream there, and escape
As a soul from the body, out of doors,
Glide through the shrubberies, drop into the lane,
And wander on the hills an hour or two,
Then back again before the house should stir.

Or else I sat on in my chamber green,
And lived my life, and thought my thoughts, and prayed
My prayers without the vicar; read my books,
Without considering whether they were fit
To do me good. Mark, there. We get no good
By being ungenerous, even to a book,
And calculating profits, — so much help
By so much reading. It is rather when
We gloriously forget ourselves and plunge
Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,
Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth —
'T is then we get the right good from a book.

I read much. What my father taught before
From many a volume, Love re-emphasized
Upon the self-same pages: Theophrast
Grew tender with the memory of his eyes,
And Ælian made mine wet. The trick of Greek
And Latin he had taught me, as he would
Have taught me wrestling or the game of fives
If such he had known, — most like a shipwrecked man
Who heaps his single platter with goats' cheese
And scarlet berries; or like any man
Who loves but one, and so gives all at once,
Because he has it, rather than because
He counts it worthy. Thus, my father gave:
And thus, as did the women formerly
By young Achilles, when they pinned a veil
Across the boy's audacious front, and swept
With tuneful laughs the silver-fretted rocks,
He wrapt his little daughter in his large
Man's doublet, careless did it fit or no.

But, after I had read for memory,
I read for hope. The path my father's foot
Had trod me out (which suddenly broke off
What time he dropped the wallet of the flesh
And passed), alone I carried on, and set
My child-heart 'gainst the thorny underwood,
To reach the grassy shelter of the trees.
Ah babe i' the wood, without a brother-babe!
My own self-pity, like the red-breast bird,
Flies back to cover all that past with leaves.

Sublimest danger, over which none weeps,
When any young wayfaring soul goes forth
Alone, unconscious of the perilous road,
The day-sun dazzling in his limpid eyes,
To thrust his own way, he an alien, through
The world of books! Ah, you! — you think it fine,

You clap hands — 'A fair day!' — you cheer him on,
As if the worst, could happen, were to rest
Too long beside a fountain. Yet, behold,
Behold! — the world of books is still the world,
And worldlings in it are less merciful
And more puissant. For the wicked there
Are winged like angels; every knife that strikes
Is edged from elemental fire to assail
A spiritual life; the beautiful seems right
By force of beauty, and the feeble wrong
Because of weakness; power is justified
Though armed against Saint Michael; many a crown
Covers bald foreheads. In the book-world, true,
There 's no lack, neither, of God's saints and kings,
That shake the ashes of the grave aside
From their calm locks and undiscomfited
Look steadfast truths against Time's changing mask.
True, many a prophet teaches in the roads;
True, many a seer pulls down the flaming heavens
Upon his own head in strong martyrdom
In order to light men a moment's space.
But stay! — who judges? — who distinguishes
'Twixt Saul and Nahash justly, at first sight,
And leaves king Saul precisely at the sin,
To serve king David? who discerns at once
The sound of the trumpets, when the trumpets blow
For Alaric as well as Charlemagne?
Who judges wizards, and can tell true seers
From conjurers? the child, there? Would you leave
That child to wander in a battle-field
And push his innocent smile against the guns;
Or even in a catacomb, — his torch
Grown ragged in the fluttering air, and all
The dark a-mutter round him? not a child.

I read books bad and good — some bad and good
At once (good aims not always make good books:
Well-tempered spades turn up ill-smelling soils
In digging vineyards even); books that prove
God's being so definitely, that man's doubt
Grows self-defined the other side the line,
Made atheist by suggestion; moral books,
Exasperating to license; genial books,
Discounting from the human dignity;
And merry books, which set you weeping when
The sun shines, — ay, and melancholy books,
Which make you laugh that any one should weep
In this disjointed life for one wrong more.

The world of books is still the world, I write,
And both worlds have God's providence, thank God,
To keep and hearten: with some struggle, indeed,
Among the breakers, some hard swimming through
The deeps — I lost breath in my soul sometimes
And cried 'God save me if there 's any God,'
But, even so, God saved me; and, being dashed
From error on to error, every turn
Still brought me nearer to the central truth.

I thought so. All this anguish in the thick
Of men's opinions . . . press and counterpress,
Now up, now down, now underfoot, and now
Emergent . . . all the best of it, perhaps,
But throws you back upon a noble trust
And use of your own instinct, — merely proves
Pure reason stronger than bare inference
At strongest. Try it, — fix against heaven's wall
The scaling-ladders of school logic — mount
Step by step! — sight goes faster; that still ray
Which strikes out from you, how, you cannot tell,

And why, you know not (did you eliminate,
That such as you indeed should analyze?)
Goes straight and fast as light, and high as God.

The cygnet finds the water, but the man
Is born in ignorance of his element
And feels out blind at first, disorganized
By sin i' the blood, — his spirit-insight dulled
And crossed by his sensations. Presently
He feels it quicken in the dark sometimes,
When, mark, be reverent, be obedient,
For such dumb motions of imperfect life
Are oracles of vital Deity
Attesting the Hereafter. Let who says
'The soul 's a clean white paper,' rather say,
A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph
Defiled, erased and covered by a monk's; —
The apocalypse, by a Longus! poring on
Which obscene text, we may discern perhaps
Some fair, fine trace of what was written once,
Some upstroke of an alpha and omega
Expressing the old scripture.
Books, books, books!
I had found the secret of a garret-room
Piled high with cases in my father's name,
Piled high, packed large, — where, creeping in and out
Among the giant fossils of my past,
Like some small nimble mouse between the ribs
Of a mastodon, I nibbled here and there
At this or that box, pulling through the gap,
In heats of terror, haste, victorious joy,
The first book first. And how I felt it beat
Under my pillow, in the morning's dark,
An hour before the sun would let me read!
My books! At last because the time was ripe,
I chanced upon the poets.
As the earth
Plunges in fury, when the internal fires
Have reached and pricked her heart, and, throwing flat
The marts and temples, the triumphal gates
And towers of observation, clears herself
To elemental freedom — thus, my soul,
At poetry's divine first finger-touch,
Let go conventions and sprang up surprised,
Convicted of the great eternities
Before two worlds.
What 's this, Aurora Leigh,
You write so of the poets, and not laugh?
Those virtuous liars, dreamers after dark,
Exaggerators of the sun and moon,
And soothsayers in a tea-cup?
I write so
Of the only truth-tellers now left to God,
The only speakers of essential truth,
Opposed to relative, comparative,
And temporal truths; the only holders by
His sun-skirts, through conventional gray glooms;
The only teachers who instruct mankind
From just a shadow on a charnel-wall
To find man's veritable stature out
Erect, sublime, — the measure of a man,
And that 's the measure of an angel, says
The apostle. Ay, and while your common men
Lay telegraphs, gauge railroads, reign, reap, dine,
And dust the flaunty carpets of the world
For kings to walk on, or our president,
The poet suddenly will catch them up
With his voice like a thunder, — 'This is soul,
This is life, this word is being said in heaven,
Here 's God down on us! what are you about?'
How all those workers start amid their work,
Look round, look up, and feel, a moment's space,
That carpet-dusting, though a pretty trade,
Is not the imperative labor after all.

My own best poets, am I one with you,
That thus I love you, — or but one through love?
Does all this smell of thyme about my feet
Conclude my visit to your holy hill
In personal presence, or but testify
The rustling of your vesture through my dreams
With influent odors? When my joy and pain,
My thought and aspiration, like the stops
Of pipe or flute, are absolutely dumb
Unless melodious, do you play on me
My pipers, — and if, sooth, you did not blow,
Would no sound come? or is the music mine,

As a man's voice or breath is called his own,
Inbreathed by the Life-breather? There 's a doubt
For cloudy seasons!
But the sun was high
When first I felt my pulses set themselves
For concord; when the rhythmic turbulence
Of blood and brain swept outward upon words,
As wind upon the alders, blanching them
By turning up their under-natures till
They trembled in dilation. O delight
And triumph of the poet, who would say
A man's mere 'yes,' a woman's common 'no,'
A little human hope of that or this,
And says the word so that it burns you through
With a special revelation, shakes the heart
Of all the men and women in the world,
As if one came back from the dead and spoke,
With eyes too happy, a familiar thing
Become divine i' the utterance! while for him
The poet, speaker, he expands with joy;
The palpitating angel in his flesh
Thrills inly with consenting fellowship
To those innumerous spirits who sun themselves
Outside of time.
O life, O poetry,
— Which means life in life! cognizant of life
Beyond this blood-beat, passionate for truth
Beyond these senses! — poetry, my life,
My eagle, with both grappling feet still hot
From Zeus's thunder, who hast ravished me
Away from all the shepherds, sheep, and dogs,
And set me in the Olympian roar and round
Of luminous faces for a cup-bearer,
To keep the mouths of all the godheads moist
For everlasting laughters, — I myself
Half drunk across the beaker with their eyes!
How those gods look!
Enough so, Ganymede,
We shall not bear above a round or two.
We drop the golden cup at Herè's foot
And swoon back to the earth, — and find ourselves
Face-down among the pine-cones, cold with dew,
While the dogs bark, and many a shepherd scoffs,
'What 's come now to the youth?' Such ups and downs
Have poets.
Am I such indeed? The name
Is royal, and to sign it like a queen
Is what I dare not, — though some royal blood
Would seem to tingle in me now and then,
With sense of power and ache, — with imposthumes
And manias usual to the race. Howbeit
I dare not: 't is too easy to go mad
And ape a Bourbon in a crown of straws;
The thing 's too common.
Many fervent souls
Strike rhyme on rhyme, who would strike steel on steel
If steel had offered, in a restless heat
Of doing something. Many tender souls
Have strung their losses on a rhyming thread,
As children cowslips: — the more pains they take,
The work more withers. Young men, ay, and maids,
Too often sow their wild oats in tame verse,
Before they sit down under their own vine
And live for use. Alas, near all the birds
Will sing at dawn, — and yet we do not take
The chaffering swallow for the holy lark.
In those days, though, I never analyzed,
Not even myself. Analysis comes late.
You catch a sight of Nature, earliest,
In full front sun-face, and your eyelids wink
And drop before the wonder of 't; you miss
The form, through seeing the light. I lived, those days,
And wrote because I lived — unlicensed else;
My heart beat in my brain. Life's violent flood
Abolished bounds, — and, which my neighbor's field,
Which mine, what mattered? it is thus in youth!
We play at leap-frog over the god Term;

The love within us and the love without
Are mixed, confounded; if we are loved or love,
We scarce distinguish: thus, with other power;
Being acted on and acting seem the same:
In that first onrush of life's chariot-wheels,
We know not if the forests move or we.

And so, like most young poets, in a flush
Of individual life I poured myself
Along the veins of others, and achieved
Mere lifeless imitations of live verse,
And made the living answer for the dead,
Profaning nature. 'Touch not, do not taste,
Nor handle,' — we 're too legal, who write young:
We beat the phorminx till we hurt our thumbs,
As if still ignorant of counterpoint;
We call the Muse, — 'O Muse, benignant Muse,' —
As if we had seen her purple-braided head,
With the eyes in it, start between the boughs
As often as a stag's. What make-believe,
With so much earnest! what effete results
From virile efforts! what cold wire-drawn odes
From such white heats! — bucolics, where the cows
Would scare the writer if they splashed the mud
In lashing off the flies, — didactics, driven
Against the heels of what the master said;
And counterfeiting epics, shrill with trumps
A babe might blow between two straining cheeks
Of bubbled rose, to make his mother laugh;
And elegiac griefs, and songs of love,
Like cast-off nosegays picked up on the road,
The worse for being warm: all these things, writ
On happy mornings, with a morning heart,
That leaps for love, is active for resolve,
Weak for art only. Oft, the ancient forms
Will thrill, indeed, in carrying the young blood.
The wine-skins, now and then, a little warped,
Will crack even, as the new wine gurgles in.
Spare the old bottles! — spill not the new wine.

By Keats's soul, the man who never stepped
In gradual progress like another man,
But, turning grandly on his central self,
Ensphered himself in twenty perfect years
And died, not young (the life of a long life
Distilled to a mere drop, falling like a tear
Upon the world's cold cheek to make it burn
For ever); by that strong excepted soul,
I count it strange and hard to understand
That nearly all young poets should write old,
That Pope was sexagenary at sixteen,
And beardless Byron academical,
And so with others. It may be perhaps
Such have not settled long and deep enough
In trance, to attain to clairvoyance, — and still
The memory mixes with the vision, spoils,
And works it turbid.
Or perhaps, again,
In order to discover the Muse-Sphinx,
The melancholy desert must sweep round,
Behind you as before. —
For me, I wrote
False poems, like the rest, and thought them true
Because myself was true in writing them.
I peradventure have writ true ones since
With less complacence.
But I could not hide
My quickening inner life from those at watch.
They saw a light at a window, now and then,
They had not set there: who had set it there?
My father's sister started when she caught
My soul agaze in my eyes. She could not say
I had no business with a sort of soul,
But plainly she objected, — and demurred
That souls were dangerous things to carry straight
Through all the spilt saltpetre of the world.
She said sometimes, 'Aurora, have you done

Your task this morning? have you read that book?
And are you ready for the crochet here?' —
As if she said, 'I know there's something wrong;
I know I have not ground you down enough
To flatten and bake you to a wholesome crust
For household uses and proprieties,
Before the rain has got into my barn
And set the grains a-sprouting. What, you're green
With out-door impudence? you almost grow?'
To which I answered, 'Would she hear my task,
And verify my abstract of the book?
Or should I sit down to the crochet work?
Was such her pleasure?' Then I sat and teased
The patient needle till it split the thread,
Which oozed off from it in meandering lace
From hour to hour. I was not, therefore, sad;
My soul was singing at a work apart
Behind the wall of sense, as safe from harm
As sings the lark when sucked up out of sight
In vortices of glory and blue air.

And so, through forced work and spontaneous work,
The inner life informed the outer life,
Reduced the irregular blood to a settled rhythm,
Made cool the forehead with fresh-sprinkling dreams,
And, rounding to the spheric soul the thin,
Pined body, struck a color up the cheeks
Though somewhat faint. I clenched my brows across
My blue eyes greatening in the looking-glass,
And said 'We'll live, Aurora! we'll be strong.
The dogs are on us — but we will not die.'

Whoever lives true life will love true love.
I learnt to love that England. Very oft,
Before the day was born, or otherwise
Through secret windings of the afternoons,
I threw my hunters off and plunged myself
Among the deep hills, as a hunted stag
Will take the waters, shivering with the fear
And passion of the course. And when at last
Escaped, so many a green slope built on slope
Betwixt me and the enemy's house behind,
I dared to rest, or wander, in a rest
Made sweeter for the step upon the grass,
And view the ground's most gentle dimplement
(As if God's finger touched but did not press
In making England), such an up and down
Of verdure, — nothing too much up or down,
A ripple of land; such little hills, the sky
Can stoop to tenderly and the wheatfields climb;
Such nooks of valleys lined with orchises,
Fed full of noises by invisible streams;
And open pastures where you scarcely tell
White daisies from white dew, — at intervals
The mythic oaks and elm-trees standing out
Self-poised upon their prodigy of shade, —
I thought my father's land was worthy too
Of being my Shakespeare's.
Very oft alone,
Unlicensed; not unfrequently with leave
To walk the third with Romney and his friend
The rising painter, Vincent Carrington,
Whom men judge hardly as bee-bonneted,
Because he holds that, paint a body well,
You paint a soul by implication, like
The grand first Master. Pleasant walks! for if
He said 'When I was last in Italy,'
It sounded as an instrument that's played
Too far off for the tune — and yet it's fine
To listen.
Ofter we walked only two
If cousin Romney pleased to walk with me.
We read, or talked, or quarrelled, as it chanced.

We were not lovers, nor even friends well-matched:
Say rather, scholars upon different tracks,
And thinkers disagreed: he, overfull
Of what is, and I, haply, overbold
For what might be.
But then the thrushes sang,
And shook my pulses and the elms' new leaves:
At which I turned, and held my finger up,
And bade him mark that, howsoe'er the world
Went ill, as he related, certainly
The thrushes still sang in it. At the word
His brow would soften, — and he bore with me
In melancholy patience, not unkind,
While breaking into voluble ecstasy
I flattered all the beauteous country round,
As poets use, the skies, the clouds, the fields,
The happy violets hiding from the roads
The primroses run down to, carrying gold;
The tangled hedgerows, where the cows push out
Impatient horns and tolerant churning mouths
'Twixt dripping ash-boughs, — hedgerows all alive
With birds and gnats and large white butterflies
Which look as if the may-flower had caught life
And palpitated forth upon the wind;
Hills, vales, woods, netted in a silver mist,
Farms, granges, doubled up among the hills;
And cattle grazing in the watered vales,
And cottage-chimneys smoking from the woods,
And cottage-gardens smelling everywhere,
Confused with smell of orchards. 'See,' I said,
'And see! is God not with us on the earth?
And shall we put Him down by aught we do?
Who says there's nothing for the poor and vile
Save poverty and wickedness? behold!'
And ankle-deep in English grass I leaped
And clapped my hands, and called all very fair
In the beginning when God called all good,
Even then was evil near us, it is writ;
But we indeed who call things good and fair,
The evil is upon us while we speak;
Deliver us from evil, let us pray.

SECOND BOOK

Times followed one another. Came a morn
I stood upon the brink of twenty years,
And looked before and after, as I stood
Woman and artist, — either incomplete,
Both credulous of completion. There I held
The whole creation in my little cup,
And smiled with thirsty lips before I drank
'Good health to you and me, sweet neighbor mine,
And all these peoples.'
I was glad, that day;
The June was in me, with its multitudes
Of nightingales all singing in the dark,
And rosebuds reddening where the calyx split.
I felt so young, so strong, so sure of God!
So glad, I could not choose be very wise!
And, old at twenty, was inclined to pull
My childhood backward in a childish jest
To see the face of 't once more, and farewell!
In which fantastic mood I bounded forth
At early morning, — would not wait so long
As even to snatch my bonnet by the strings,
But, brushing a green trail across the lawn
With my gown in the dew, took will and way
Among the acacias of the shrubberies,
To fly my fancies in the open air
And keep my birthday, till my aunt awoke
To stop good dreams. Meanwhile I murmured on
As honeyed bees keep humming to themselves,
'The worthiest poets have remained uncrowned
Till death has bleached their foreheads to the bone;
And so with me it must be unless I prove
Unworthy of the grand adversity,

And certainly I would not fail so much.
What, therefore, if I crown myself to-day
In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it,
Before my brows be numbed as Dante's own
To all the tender pricking of such leaves?
Such leaves! what leaves?'
I pulled the branches down
To choose from.
'Not the bay! I choose no bay
(The fates deny us if we are overbold),
Nor myrtle — which means chiefly love; and love
Is something awful which one dares not touch
So early o' mornings. This verbena strains
The point of passionate fragrance; and hard by,
This guelder-rose, at far too slight a beck
Of the wind, will toss about her flower-apples.
Ah — there 's my choice, — that ivy on the wall,
That headlong ivy! not a leaf will grow
But thinking of a wreath. Large leaves, smooth leaves,
Serrated like my vines, and half as green.
I like such ivy, bold to leap a height
'T was strong to climb; as good to grow on graves
As twist about a thyrsus; pretty too
(And that 's not ill) when twisted round a comb.'
Thus speaking to myself, half singing it,
Because some thoughts are fashioned like a bell
To ring with once being touched, I drew a wreath
Drenched, blinding me with dew, across my brow,
And fastening it behind so, turning faced
. . . My public! — cousin Romney — with a mouth
Twice graver than his eyes.
I stood there fixed, —
My arms up, like the caryatid, sole
Of some abolished temple, helplessly
Persistent in a gesture which derides
A former purpose. Yet my blush was flame,
As if from flax, not stone.
'Aurora Leigh,
The earliest of Auroras!'
Hand stretched out
I clasped, as shipwrecked men will clasp a hand,
Indifferent to the sort of palm. The tide
Had caught me at my pastime, writing down
My foolish name too near upon the sea
Which drowned me with a blush as foolish. 'You,
My cousin!'
The smile died out in his eyes
And dropped upon his lips, a cold dead weight,
For just a moment, 'Here 's a book I found!
No name writ on it — poems, by the form;
Some Greek upon the margin, — lady's Greek
Without the accents. Read it? Not a word.
I saw at once the thing had witchcraft in 't,
Whereof the reading calls up dangerous spirits:
I rather bring it to the witch.'
'My book.
You found it' . . . .
'In the hollow by the stream
That beech leans down into — of which you said
The Oread in it has a Naiad's heart
And pines for waters.'
'Thank you.'
'Thanks to *you*
My cousin! that I have seen you not too much
Witch, scholar, poet, dreamer, and the rest,
To be a woman also.'
With a glance
The smile rose in his eyes again and touched
The ivy on my forehead, light as air.
I answered gravely, 'Poets needs must be
Or men or women — more 's the pity.'
'Ah,
But men, and still less women, happily,
Scarce need be poets. Keep to the green wreath,
Since even dreaming of the stone and bronze
Brings headaches, pretty cousin, and defiles
The clean white morning dresses.'
'So you judge!
Because I love the beautiful I must
Love pleasure chiefly, and be overcharged

For ease and whiteness! well, you know the world,
And only miss your cousin, 't is not much.
But learn this; I would rather take my part
With God's Dead, who afford to walk in white
Yet spread his glory, than keep quiet here
And gather up my feet from even a step
For fear to soil my gown in so much dust.
I choose to walk at all risks. — Here, if heads
That hold a rhythmic thought, must ache perforce,
For my part I choose headaches, — and to-day 's
My birthday.'
 'Dear Aurora, choose instead
To cure them. You have balsams.'
 'I perceive.
The headache is too noble for my sex.
You think the heartache would sound decenter,
Since that 's the woman's special, proper ache,
And altogether tolerable, except
To a woman.'
 Saying which, I loosed my wreath,
And swinging it beside me as I walked,
Half-petulant, half-playful, as we walked,
I sent a sidelong look to find his thought, —
As falcon set on falconer's finger may,
With sidelong head, and startled, braving eye,
Which means, 'You 'll see — you 'll see! I 'll soon take flight,
You shall not hinder.' He, as shaking out
His hand and answering 'Fly then,' did not speak,
Except by such a gesture. Silently
We paced, until, just coming into sight
Of the house-windows, he abruptly caught
At one end of the swinging wreath, and said
'Aurora!' There I stopped short, breath and all.

'Aurora, let 's be serious, and throw by
This game of head and heart. Life means, be sure,
Both heart and head, — both active, both complete,
And both in earnest. Men and women make
The world, as head and heart make human life.
Work man, work woman, since there 's work to do
In this beleaguered earth, for head and heart,
And thought can never do the work of love:
But work for ends, I mean for uses, not
For such sleek fringes (do you call them ends,
Still less God's glory?) as we sew ourselves
Upon the velvet of those baldaquins
Held 'twixt us and the sun. That book of yours,
I have not read a page of; but I toss
A rose up — it falls calyx down, you see!
The chances are that, being a woman, young
And pure, with such a pair of large, calm eyes,
You write as well . . . and ill . . . upon the whole,
As other women. If as well, what then?
If even a little better, . . . still, what then?
We want the Best in art now, or no art.
The time is done for facile settings up
Of minnow gods, nymphs here and tritons there;
The polytheists have gone out in God,
That unity of Bests. No best, no God!
And so with art, we say. Give art's divine,
Direct, indubitable, real as grief,
Or leave us to the grief we grow ourselves
Divine by overcoming with mere hope
And most prosaic patience. You, you are young
As Eve with nature's daybreak on her face,
But this same world you are come to, dearest coz,
Has done with keeping birthdays, saves her wreaths
To hang upon her ruins, — and forgets
To rhyme the cry with which she still beats back
Those savage, hungry dogs that hunt her down
To the empty grave of Christ. The world 's hard pressed:
The sweat of labor in the early curse
Has (turning acrid in six thousand years)
Become the sweat of torture. Who has time,
An hour's time . . . think! — to sit upon a bank

And hear the cymbal tinkle in white hands?
When Egypt 's slain, I say, let Miriam sing! —
Before — where 's Moses?'
'Ah, exactly that.
Where 's Moses? — is a Moses to be found?
You 'll seek him vainly in the bulrushes,
While I in vain touch cymbals. Yet concede,
Such sounding brass has done some actual good
(The application in a woman's hand,
If that were credible, being scarcely spoilt,)
In colonizing beehives.'
'There it is! —
You play beside a death-bed like a child,
Yet measure to yourself a prophet's place
To teach the living. None of all these things
Can women understand. You generalize
Oh, nothing, — not even grief! Your quick-breathed hearts,
So sympathetic to the personal pang,
Close on each separate knife-stroke, yielding up
A whole life at each wound, incapable
Of deepening, widening a large lap of life
To hold the world-full woe. The human race
To you means, such a child, or such a man,
You saw one morning waiting in the cold,
Beside that gate, perhaps. You gather up
A few such cases, and when strong sometimes
Will write of factories and of slaves, as if
Your father were a negro, and your son
A spinner in the mills. All 's yours and you,
All, colored with your blood, or otherwise
Just nothing to you. Why, I call you hard
To general suffering. Here 's the world half blind
With intellectual light, half brutalized
With civilization, having caught the plague
In silks from Tarsus, shrieking east and west
Along a thousand railroads, mad with pain
And sin too! . . . does one woman of you all
(You who weep easily) grow pale to see
This tiger shake his cage? — does one of you
Stand still from dancing, stop from stringing pearls,
And pine and die because of the great sum
Of universal anguish? — Show me a tear
Wet as Cordelia's, in eyes bright as yours,
Because the world is mad. You cannot count,
That you should weep for this account, not you!
You weep for what you know. A red-haired child
Sick in a fever, if you touch him once,
Though but so little as with a finger-tip,
Will set you weeping; but a million sick . . .
You could as soon weep for the rule of three
Or compound fractions. Therefore, this same world,
Uncomprehended by you, must remain
Uninfluenced by you. — Women as you are,
Mere women, personal and passionate,
You give us doating mothers, and perfect wives,
Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
We get no Christ from you, — and verily
We shall not get a poet, in my mind.'
'With which conclusion you conclude' . . .
'But this,
That you, Aurora, with the large live brow
And steady eyelids, cannot condescend
To play at art, as children play at swords,
To show a pretty spirit, chiefly admired
Because true action is impossible.
You never can be satisfied with praise
Which men give women when they judge a book
Not as mere work but as mere woman's work,
Expressing the comparative respect
Which means the absolute scorn. "Oh, excellent,
What grace, what facile turns, what fluent sweeps,
What delicate discernment . . . almost thought!
The book does honor to the sex, we hold.
Among our female authors we make room
For this fair writer, and congratulate
The country that produces in these times
Such women, competent to . . . spell."'
'Stop there,'
I answered, burning through his thread of talk
With a quick flame of emotion, — 'You have read
My soul, if not my book, and argue well

I would not condescend . . . we will not say
To such a kind of praise (a worthless end
Is praise of all kinds), but to such a use
Of holy art and golden life. I am young,
And peradventure weak — you tell me so —
Through being a woman. And, for all the rest,
Take thanks for justice. I would rather dance
At fairs on tight-rope, till the babies dropped
Their gingerbread for joy, — than shift the types
For tolerable verse, intolerable
To men who act and suffer. Better far
Pursue a frivolous trade by serious means,
Than a sublime art frivolously.'
'You,
Choose nobler work than either, O moist eyes
And hurrying lips and heaving heart! We are young,
Aurora, you and I. The world, — look round, —
The world, we 're come to late, is swollen hard
With perished generations and their sins:
The civilizer's spade grinds horribly
On dead men's bones, and cannot turn up soil
That 's otherwise than fetid. All success
Proves partial failure; all advance implies
What 's left behind; all triumph, something crushed
At the chariot-wheels; all government, some wrong:
And rich men make the poor, who curse the rich,
Who agonize together, rich and poor,
Under and over, in the social spasm
And crisis of the ages. Here 's an age
That makes its own vocation! here we have stepped
Across the bounds of time! here 's nought to see,
But just the rich man and just Lazarus,
And both in torments, with a mediate gulf,
Though not a hint of Abraham's bosom. Who
Being man, Aurora, can stand calmly by
And view these things, and never tease his soul
For some great cure? No physic for this grief,
In all the earth and heavens too?'
'You believe
In God, for your part? — ay? that He who makes
Can make good things from ill things, best from worst,
As men plant tulips upon dunghills when
They wish them finest?'
'True. A death-heat is
The same as life-heat, to be accurate,
And in all nature is no death at all,
As men account of death, so long as God
Stands witnessing for life perpetually,
By being just God. That 's abstract truth, I know,
Philosophy, or sympathy with God:
But I, I sympathize with man, not God
(I think I was a man for chiefly this),
And when I stand beside a dying bed,
'T is death to me. Observe, — it had not much
Consoled the race of mastodons to know,
Before they went to fossil, that anon
Their place would quicken with the elephant.
They were not elephants but mastodons;
And I, a man, as men are now and not
As men may be hereafter, feel with men
In the agonizing present.'
'Is it so,'
I said, 'my cousin? is the world so bad,
While I hear nothing of it through the trees?
The world was always evil, — but so bad?'

'So bad, Aurora. Dear, my soul is gray
With poring over the long sum of ill;
So much for vice, so much for discontent,
So much for the necessities of power,
So much for the connivances of fear,
Coherent in statistical despairs
With such a total of distracted life, . . .
To see it down in figures on a page,
Plain, silent, clear, as God sees through the earth
The sense of all the graves, — that 's terrible
For one who is not God, and cannot right
The wrong he looks on. May I choose indeed,

But vow away my years, my means, my aims,
Among the helpers, if there 's any help
In such a social strait? The common blood
That swings along my veins is strong enough
To draw me to this duty.'
Then I spoke.
'I have not stood long on the strand of life,
And these salt waters have had scarcely time
To creep so high up as to wet my feet:
I cannot judge these tides — I shall, perhaps.
A woman 's always younger than a man
At equal years, because she is disallowed
Maturing by the outdoor sun and air,
And kept in long-clothes past the age to walk.
Ah well, I know you men judge otherwise!
You think a woman ripens, as a peach,
In the cheeks chiefly. Pass it to me now;
I 'm young in age, and younger still, I think,
As a woman. But a child may say amen
To a bishop's prayer and feel the way it goes,
And I, incapable to loose the knot
Of social questions, can approve, applaud
August compassion, Christian thoughts that shoot
Beyond the vulgar white of personal aims.
Accept my reverence.'
There he glowed on me
With all his face and eyes. 'No other help?'
Said he — 'no more than so?'
'What help?' I asked.
'You 'd scorn my help, — as Nature's self, you say,
Has scorned to put her music in my mouth
Because a woman's. Do you now turn round
And ask for what a woman cannot give?'

'For what she only can, I turn and ask,'
He answered, catching up my hands in his,
And dropping on me from his high-eaved brow
The full weight of his soul, — 'I ask for love,
And that, she can; for life in fellowship
Through bitter duties — that, I know she can;
For wifehood — will she?'
'Now,' I said, 'may God
Be witness 'twixt us two!' and with the word,
Meseemed I floated into a sudden light
Above his stature, — 'am I proved too weak
To stand alone, yet strong enough to bear
Such leaners on my shoulder? poor to think,
Yet rich enough to sympathize with thought?
Incompetent to sing, as blackbirds can,
Yet competent to love, like HIM?'
I paused;
Perhaps I darkened, as the lighthouse will
That turns upon the sea. 'It 's always so.
Anything does for a wife.'
'Aurora, dear,
And dearly honored,' — he pressed in at once
With eager utterance, — 'you translate me ill.
I do not contradict my thought of you
Which is most reverent, with another thought
Found less so. If your sex is weak for art
(And I, who said so, did but honor you
By using truth in courtship), it is strong
For life and duty. Place your fecund heart
In mine, and let us blossom for the world
That wants love's color in the gray of time.
My talk, meanwhile, is arid to you, ay,
Since all my talk can only set you where
You look down coldly on the arena-heaps
Of headless bodies, shapeless, indistinct!
The Judgment-Angel scarce would find his way
Through such a heap of generalized distress
To the individual man with lips and eyes,
Much less Aurora. Ah, my sweet, come down;
And hand in hand we 'll go where yours shall touch

These victims, one by one! till, one by one,
The formless, nameless trunk of every man
Shall seem to wear a head with hair you know,
And every woman catch your mother's face
To melt you into passion.'
'I am a girl,'
I answered slowly; 'you do well to name
My mother's face. Though far too early, alas,
God's hand did interpose 'twixt it and me,
I know so much of love as used to shine
In that face and another. Just so much;
No more indeed at all. I have not seen
So much love since, I pray you pardon me,
As answers even to make a marriage with
In this cold land of England. What you love
Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause:
You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir,
A wife to help your ends, — in her no end.
Your cause is noble, your ends excellent,
But I, being most unworthy of these and that,
Do otherwise conceive of love. Farewell.'

'Farewell, Aurora? you reject me thus?'
He said.
'Sir, you were married long ago.
You have a wife already whom you love,
Your social theory. Bless you both, I say.
For my part, I am scarcely meek enough
To be the handmaid of a lawful spouse.
Do I look a Hagar, think you?'
'So you jest.'

'Nay, so, I speak in earnest,' I replied.
'You treat of marriage too much like, at least,
A chief apostle: you would bear with you
A wife . . . a sister . . . shall we speak it out?
A sister of charity.'
'Then, must it be
Indeed farewell? And was I so far wrong
In hope and in illusion, when I took
The woman to be nobler than the man,
Yourself the noblest woman, in the use
And comprehension of what love is, — love,
That generates the likeness of itself
Through all heroic duties? so far wrong,
In saying bluntly, venturing truth on love,
"Come, human creature, love and work with me," —
Instead of "Lady, thou art wondrous fair,
And, where the Graces walk before, the Muse
Will follow at the lightning of their eyes,
And where the Muse walks, lovers need to creep:
Turn round and love me, or I die of love."'

With quiet indignation I broke in.
'You misconceive the question like a man,
Who sees the woman as the complement
Of his sex merely. You forget too much
That every creature, female as the male,
Stands single in responsible act and thought
As also in birth and death. Whoever says
To a loyal woman, "Love and work with me,"
Will get fair answers if the work and love,
Being good themselves, are good for her — the best
She was born for. Women of a softer mood,
Surprised by men when scarcely awake to life,
Will sometimes only hear the first word, love,
And catch up with it any kind of work,
Indifferent, so that dear love go with it.
I do not blame such women, though, for love,
They pick much oakum; earth's fanatics make
Too frequently heaven's saints. But *me* your work
Is not the best for, — nor your love the best,
Nor able to commend the kind of work
For love's sake merely. Ah, you force me, sir,
To be overbold in speaking of myself:
I too have my vocation, — work to do,
The heavens and earth have set me since I changed
My father's face for theirs, and, though your world
Were twice as wretched as you represent,
Most serious work, most necessary work
As any of the economists'. Reform,
Make trade a Christian possibility,
And individual right no general wrong;

Wipe out earth's furrows of the Thine and Mine,
And leave one green for men to play at bowls,
With innings for them all! . . . What then, indeed,
If mortals are not greater by the head
Than any of their prosperities? what then,
Unless the artist keep up open roads
Betwixt the seen and unseen, — bursting through
The best of your conventions with his best,
The speakable, imaginable best
God bids him speak, to prove what lies beyond
Both speech and imagination? A starved man
Exceeds a fat beast: we 'll not barter, sir,
The beautiful for barley. — And, even so,
I hold you will not compass your poor ends
Of barley-feeding and material ease,
Without a poet's individualism
To work your universal. It takes a soul,
To move a body: it takes a high-souled man,
To move the masses, even to a cleaner stye:
It takes the ideal, to blow a hair's-breadth off
The dust of the actual. — Ah, your Fouriers failed,
Because not poets enough to understand
That life develops from within. — For me,
Perhaps I am not worthy, as you say,
Of work like this: perhaps a woman's soul
Aspires, and not creates: yet we aspire,
And yet I 'll try out your perhapses, sir,
And if I fail . . . why, burn me up my straw
Like other false works — I 'll not ask for grace;
Your scorn is better, cousin Romney. I
Who love my art, would never wish it lower
To suit my stature. I may love my art.
You 'll grant that even a woman may love art,
Seeing that to waste true love on anything
Is womanly, past question.'
                                        I retain
The very last word which I said that day,
As you the creaking of the door, years past,
Which let upon you such disabling news
You ever after have been graver. He,
His eyes, the motions in his silent mouth,
Were fiery points on which my words were caught,
Transfixed for ever in my memory
For his sake, not their own. And yet I know
I did not love him . . . nor he me . . . that 's sure . . .
And what I said is unrepented of,
As truth is always. Yet . . . a princely man! —
If hard to me, heroic for himself!
He bears down on me through the slanting years,
The stronger for the distance. If he had loved,
Ay, loved me, with that retributive face, . . .
I might have been a common woman now
And happier, less known and less left alone,
Perhaps a better woman after all,
With chubby children hanging on my neck
To keep me low and wise. Ah me, the vines
That bear such fruit are proud to stoop with it.
The palm stands upright in a realm of sand.

And I, who spoke the truth then, stand upright,
Still worthy of having spoken out the truth,
By being content I spoke it though it set
Him there, me here. — O woman's vile remorse,
To hanker after a mere name, a show,
A supposition, a potential love!
Does every man who names love in our lives
Become a power for that? is love's true thing
So much best to us, that what personates love
Is next best? A potential love, forsooth!
I 'm not so vile. No, no — he cleaves, I think,
This man, this image, — chiefly for the wrong
And shock he gave my life, in finding me
Precisely where the devil of my youth
Had set me, on those mountain-peaks of hope

All glittering with the dawn-dew, all erect
And famished for the noon, — exclaiming, while
I looked for empire and much tribute, 'Come,
I have some worthy work for thee below.
Come, sweep my barns and keep my hospitals,
And I will pay thee with a current coin
Which men give women.'
As we spoke, the grass
Was trod in haste beside us, and my aunt,
With smile distorted by the sun, — face, voice
As much at issue with the summer-day
As if you brought a candle out of doors,
Broke in with 'Romney here! — My child, entreat
Your cousin to the house, and have your talk,
If girls must talk upon their birthdays. Come.'

He answered for me calmly, with pale lips
That seemed to motion for a smile in vain,
'The talk is ended, madam, where we stand.
Your brother's daughter has dismissed me here;
And all my answer can be better said
Beneath the trees, than wrong by such a word
Your house's hospitalities. Farewell.'

With that he vanished. I could hear his heel
Ring bluntly in the lane, as down he leapt
The short way from us. — Then a measured speech
Withdrew me. 'What means this, Aurora Leigh?
My brother's daughter has dismissed my guests?'

The lion in me felt the keeper's voice
Through all its quivering dew-laps; I was quelled
Before her, — meekened to the child she knew:
I prayed her pardon, said 'I had little thought
To give dismissal to a guest of hers,
In letting go a friend of mine who came
To take me into service as a wife, —
No more than that, indeed.'
'No more, no more?
Pray Heaven,' she answered, 'that I was not mad.
I could not mean to tell her to her face
That Romney Leigh had asked me for a wife,
And I refused him?'
'Did he ask?' I said;
'I think he rather stooped to take me up
For certain uses which he found to do
For something called a wife. He never asked.'

'What stuff!' she answered; 'are they queens, these girls?
They must have mantles, stitched with twenty silks,
Spread out upon the ground, before they'll step
One footstep for the noblest lover born.'
'But I am born,' I said with firmness, 'I,
To walk another way than his, dear aunt.'

'You walk, you walk! A babe at thirteen months
Will walk as well as you,' she cried in haste,
'Without a steadying finger. Why, you child,
God help you, you are groping in the dark,
For all this sunlight. You suppose, perhaps,
That you, sole offspring of an opulent man,
Are rich and free to choose a way to walk?
You think, and it's a reasonable thought,
That I, beside, being well to do in life,
Will leave my handful in my niece's hand
When death shall paralyze these fingers? Pray,
Pray, child, albeit I know you love me not,
As if you loved me, that I may not die!
For when I die and leave you, out you go
(Unless I make room for you in my grave),
Unhoused, unfed, my dear poor brother's lamb
(Ah heaven! — that pains!) — without a right to crop
A single blade of grass beneath these trees,
Or cast a lamb's small shadow on the lawn,
Unfed, unfolded! Ah, my brother, here's

The fruit you planted in your foreign loves! —
Ay, there 's the fruit he planted! never look
Astonished at me with your mother's eyes,
For it was they who set you where you are,
An undowered orphan. Child, your father's choice
Of that said mother disinherited
His daughter, his and hers. Men do not think
Of sons and daughters, when they fall in love,
So much more than of sisters; otherwise
He would have paused to ponder what he did,
And shrunk before that clause in the entail
Excluding offspring by a foreign wife
(The clause set up a hundred years ago
By a Leigh who wedded a French dancing-girl
And had his heart danced over in return);
But this man shrank at nothing, never thought
Of you, Aurora, any more than me —
Your mother must have been a pretty thing,
For all the coarse Italian blacks and browns,
To make a good man, which my brother was,
Unchary of the duties to his house;
But so it fell indeed. Our cousin Vane,
Vane Leigh, the father of this Romney, wrote
Directly on your birth, to Italy,
" I ask your baby daughter for my son,
In whom the entail now merges by the law.
Betroth her to us out of love, instead
Of colder reasons, and she shall not lose
By love or law from henceforth,' — so he wrote;
A generous cousin was my cousin Vane.
Remember how he drew you to his knee
The year you came here, just before he died,
And hollowed out his hands to hold your cheeks,
And wished them redder, — you remember Vane.
And now his son, who represents our house,
And holds the fiefs and manors in his place,
To whom reverts my pittance when I die
(Except a few books and a pair of shawls)
The boy is generous like him, and prepared
To carry out his kindest word and thought
To you, Aurora Yes, a fine young man
Is Romney Leigh; although the sun of youth
Has shone too straight upon his brain, I know,
And fevered him with dreams of doing good
To good-for-nothing people. But a wife
Will put all right, and stroke his temples cool
With healthy touches.' . . .
                                        I broke in at that
I could not lift my heavy heart to breathe
Till then, but then I raised it, and it fell
In broken words like these — ' No need to wait:
The dream of doing good to . . . me, at least,
Is ended, without waiting for a wife
To cool the fever for him. We 've escaped
That danger, — thank Heaven for it.'
                                        'You,' she cried,
' Have got a fever. What, I talk and talk
An hour long to you, — I instruct you how
You cannot eat or drink or stand or sit
Or even die, like any decent wretch
In all this unroofed and unfurnished world,
Without your cousin, — and you still maintain
There 's room 'twixt him and you for flirting fans
And running knots in eyebrows? You must have
A pattern lover sighing on his knee?
You do not count enough, a noble heart
(Above book-patterns) which this very morn
Unclosed itself in two dear fathers' names
To embrace your orphaned life? Fie, fie!
                                        But stay,
I write a word, and counteract this sin.'

She would have turned to leave me, but I clung.
'O sweet my father's sister, hear my word
Before you write yours. Cousin Vane did well,
And cousin Romney well, — and I well too,

In casting back with all my strength and will
The good they meant me. O my God, my God!
God meant me good, too, when He hindered me
From saying "yes" this morning. If you write
A word, it shall be "no." I say no, no!
I tie up "no" upon his altar-horns,
Quite out of reach of perjury! At least
My soul is not a pauper; I can live
At least my soul's life, without alms from men;
And if it must be in heaven instead of earth,
Let heaven look to it, — I am not afraid.'

She seized my hands with both hers, strained them fast,
And drew her probing and unscrupulous eyes
Right through me, body and heart. 'Yet, foolish Sweet,
You love this man. I've watched you when he came,
And when he went, and when we've talked of him:
I am not old for nothing; I can tell
The weather-signs of love: you love this man.'

Girls blush sometimes because they are alive,
Half wishing they were dead to save the shame.
The sudden blush devours them, neck and brow;
They have drawn too near the fire of life, like gnats,
And flare up bodily, wings and all. What then?
Who's sorry for a gnat . . . or girl?
I blushed.
I feel the brand upon my forehead now
Strike hot, sear deep, as guiltless men may feel
The felon's iron, say, and scorn the mark
Of what they are not. Most illogical
Irrational nature of our womanhood,
That blushes one way, feels another way,
And prays, perhaps, another! After all,
We cannot be the equal of the male
Who rules his blood a little.
For although
I blushed indeed, as if I loved the man,
And her incisive smile, accrediting
That treason of false witness in my blush,
Did bow me downward like a swathe of grass
Below its level that struck me, — I attest
The conscious skies and all their daily suns,
I think I loved him not, — nor then, nor since,
Nor ever. Do we love the schoolmaster,
Being busy in the woods? much less, being poor,
The overseer of the parish? Do we keep
Our love to pay our debts with?
White and cold
I grew next moment. As my blood recoiled
From that imputed ignominy, I made
My heart great with it. Then, at last, I spoke,
Spoke veritable words but passionate,
Too passionate perhaps . . . ground up with sobs
To shapeless endings. She let fall my hands
And took her smile off, in sedate disgust,
As peradventure she had touched a snake, —
A dead snake, mind! — and, turning round, replied,
'We'll leave Italian manners, if you please.
I think you had an English father, child,
And ought to find it possible to speak
A quiet "yes" or "no," like English girls,
Without convulsions. In another month
We'll take another answer — no, or yes.'
With that, she left me in the garden-walk.

I had a father! yes, but long ago —
How long it seemed that moment. Oh, how far,
How far and safe, God, dost thou keep thy saints
When once gone from us! We may call against
The lighted windows of thy fair June-heaven
Where all the souls are happy, — and not one,
Not even my father, look from work or play

To ask, 'Who is it that cries after us,
Below there, in the dusk?' Yet formerly
He turned his face upon me quick enough,
If I said 'father.' Now I might cry loud;
The little lark reached higher with his song
Than I with crying. Oh, alone, alone,—
Not troubling any in heaven, nor any on earth,
I stood there in the garden, and looked up
The deaf blue sky that brings the roses out
On such June mornings.
You who keep account
Of crisis and transition in this life,
Set down the first time Nature says plain 'no'
To some 'yes' in you, and walks over you
In gorgeous sweeps of scorn. We all begin
By singing with the birds, and running fast
With June days, hand in hand: but once, for all,
The birds must sing against us, and the sun
Strike down upon us like a friend's sword caught
By an enemy to slay us, while we read
The dear name on the blade which bites at us!—
That's bitter and convincing: after that,
We seldom doubt that something in the large
Smooth order of creation, though no more
Than haply a man's footstep, has gone wrong.
Some tears fell down my cheeks, and then I smiled,
As those smile who have no face in the world
To smile back to them. I had lost a friend
In Romney Leigh; the thing was sure—a friend,
Who had looked at me most gently now and then,
And spoken of my favorite books, 'our books,'
With such a voice! Well, voice and look were now
More utterly shut out from me, I felt,
Than even my father's. Romney now was turned
To a benefactor, to a generous man,
Who had tied himself to marry . . . me, instead
Of such a woman, with low timorous lids
He lifted with a sudden word one day,
And left, perhaps, for my sake.—Ah, self-tied
By a contract, male Iphigenia bound
At a fatal Aulis for the winds to change
(But loose him, they'll not change), he well might seem
A little cold and dominant in love!
He had a right to be dogmatical,
This poor, good Romney. Love, to him, was made
A simple law-clause. If I married him,
I should not dare to call my soul my own
Which so he had bought and paid for: every thought
And every heart-beat down there in the bill;
Not one found honestly deductible
From any use that pleased him! He might cut
My body into coins to give away
Among his other paupers; change my sons,
While I stood dumb as Griseld, for black babes
Or piteous foundlings; might unquestioned set
My right hand teaching in the Ragged Schools,
My left hand washing in the Public Baths,
What time my angel of the Ideal stretched
Both his to me in vain. I could not claim
The poor right of a mouse in a trap, to squeal,
And take so much as pity from myself.

Farewell, good Romney! if I loved you even,
I could but ill afford to let you be
So generous to me. Farewell, friend, since friend
Betwixt us two, forsooth, must be a word
So heavily overladen. And, since help
Must come to me from those who love me not,
Farewell, all helpers—I must help myself,
And am alone from henceforth.—Then I stooped
And lifted the soiled garland from the earth,

And set it on my head as bitterly
As when the Spanish monarch crowned the bones
Of his dead love. So be it. I preserve
That crown still, — in the drawer there! 't was the first.
The rest are like it; — those Olympian crowns,
We run for, till we lose sight of the sun
In the dust of the racing chariots!
After that,
Before the evening fell, I had a note,
Which ran, — 'Aurora, sweet Chaldean, you read
My meaning backward like your eastern books,
While I am from the west, dear. Read me now
A little plainer. Did you hate me quite
But yesterday? I loved you for my part;
I love you. If I spoke untenderly
This morning, my beloved, pardon it;
And comprehend me that I loved you so
I set you on the level of my soul,
And overwashed you with the bitter brine
Of some habitual thoughts. Henceforth, my flower,
Be planted out of reach of any such,
And lean the side you please, with all your leaves!
Write woman's verses and dream woman's dreams;
But let me feel your perfume in my home
To make my sabbath after working-days.
Bloom out your youth beside me, — be my wife.'

I wrote in answer — 'We Chaldeans discern
Still farther than we read. I know your heart,
And shut it like the holy book it is,
Reserved for mild-eyed saints to pore upon
Betwixt their prayers at vespers. Well, you 're right,
I did not surely hate you yesterday;
And yet I do not love you enough to-day
To wed you, cousin Romney. Take this word,
And let it stop you as a generous man
From speaking farther. You may tease, indeed,
And blow about my feelings, or my leaves,
And here 's my aunt will help you with east winds
And break a stalk, perhaps, tormenting me;
But certain flowers grow near as deep as trees,
And, cousin, you 'll not move my root, not you,
With all your confluent storms. Then let me grow
Within my wayside hedge, and pass your way!
This flower has never as much to say to you
As the antique tomb which said to travellers, "Pause,
Siste, viator."' Ending thus, I sighed.

The next week passed in silence, so the next,
And several after: Romney did not come
Nor my aunt chide me. I lived on and on,
As if my heart were kept beneath a glass,
And everybody stood, all eyes and ears,
To see and hear it tick. I could not sit,
Nor walk, nor take a book, nor lay it down,
Nor sew on steadily, nor drop a stitch,
And a sigh with it, but I felt her looks
Still cleaving to me, like the sucking asp
To Cleopatra's breast, persistently
Through the intermittent pantings. Being observed,
When observation is not sympathy,
Is just being tortured. If she said a word,
A 'thank you,' or an 'if it please you, dear,'
She meant a commination, or, at best,
An exorcism against the devildom
Which plainly held me. So with all the house.
Susannah could not stand and twist my hair
Without such glancing at the looking-glass
To see my face there, that she missed the plait.
And John, — I never sent my plate for soup,
Or did not send it, but the foolish John
Resolved the problem, 'twixt his napkined thumbs,
Of what was signified by taking soup
Or choosing mackerel. Neighbors who dropped in
On morning visits, feeling a joint wrong,

Smiled admonition, sat uneasily,
And talked, with measured, emphasized reserve,
Of parish news, like doctors to the sick,
When not called in, — as if, with leave to speak,
They might say something. Nay, the very dog
Would watch me from his sun-patch on the floor,
In alternation with the large black fly
Not yet in reach of snapping. So I lived.

A Roman died so; smeared with honey, teased
By insects, stared to torture by the noon:
And many patient souls 'neath English roofs
Have died like Romans. I, in looking back,
Wish only, now, I had borne the plague of all
With meeker spirits than were rife at Rome.

For, on the sixth week, the dead sea broke up,
Dashed suddenly through beneath the heel of Him
Who stands upon the sea and earth and swears
Time shall be nevermore. The clock struck nine
That morning too, — no lark was out of tune,
The hidden farms among the hills breathed straight
Their smoke toward heaven, the lime-tree scarcely stirred
Beneath the blue weight of the cloudless sky,
Though still the July air came floating through
The woodbine at my window, in and out,
With touches of the out-door country news
For a bending forehead. There I sat, and wished
That morning-truce of God would last till eve,
Or longer. 'Sleep,' I thought, 'late sleepers, — sleep,
And spare me yet the burden of your eyes.'

Then, suddenly, a single ghastly shriek
Tore upward from the bottom of the house.
Like one who wakens in a grave and shrieks,
The still house seemed to shriek itself alive,
And shudder through its passages and stairs
With slam of doors and clash of bells. — I sprang,
I stood up in the middle of the room,
And there confronted at my chamber-door
A white face, — shivering, ineffectual lips.

'Come, come,' they tried to utter, and I went:
As if a ghost had drawn me at the point
Of a fiery finger through the uneven dark,
I went with reeling footsteps down the stair,
Nor asked a question.
                    There she sat, my aunt, —
Bolt upright in the chair beside her bed,
Whose pillow had no dint! she had used no bed
For that night's sleeping, yet slept well. My God,
The dumb derision of that gray, peaked face
Concluded something grave against the sun,
Which filled the chamber with its July burst
When Susan drew the curtains ignorant
Of who sat open-eyed behind her. There
She sat . . . it sat . . . we said 'she' yesterday . . .
And held a letter with unbroken seal
As Susan gave it to her hand last night:
All night she had held it. If its news referred
To duchies or to dunghills, not an inch
She 'd budge, 't was obvious, for such worthless odds:
Nor, though the stars were suns and overburned
Their spheric limitations, swallowing up
Like wax the azure spaces, could they force
Those open eyes to wink once. What last sight
Had left them blank and flat so, — drawing out
The faculty of vision from the roots,
As nothing more, worth seeing, remained behind?

Were those the eyes that watched me, worried me ?
That dogged me up and down the hours and days,
A beaten, breathless, miserable soul ?
And did I pray, a half-hour back, but so,
To escape the burden of those eyes . . . those eyes ?
‘Sleep late,’ I said ? —
Why, now, indeed, they sleep.
God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,
And thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our face,
A gauntlet with a gift in ’t. Every wish
Is like a prayer, with God.
I had my wish,
To read and meditate the thing I would,
To fashion all my life upon my thought,
And marry or not marry. Henceforth none
Could disapprove me, vex me, hamper me.
Full ground-room, in this desert newly made,
For Babylon or Baalbec, — when the breath,
Now choked with sand, returns for building towns.

The heir came over on the funeral day,
And we two cousins met before the dead,
With two pale faces. Was it death or life
That moved us ? When the will was read and done,
The official guests and witnesses withdrawn,
We rose up in a silence almost hard,
And looked at one another. Then I said,
‘Farewell, my cousin.’
But he touched, just touched
My hatstrings, tied for going (at the door
The carriage stood to take me), and said low,
His voice a little unsteady through his smile,
‘Siste, viator.’
‘Is there time,’ I asked,
‘In these last days of railroads, to stop short
Like Cæsar’s chariot (weighing half a ton)
On the Appian road, for morals ? ’
‘There is time,’
He answered grave, ‘for necessary words,
Inclusive, trust me, of no epitaph
On man or act, my cousin. We have read
A will, which gives you all the personal goods
And funded moneys of your aunt.’
‘I thank
Her memory for it. With three hundred pounds
We buy, in England even, clear standing-room
To stand and work in. Only two hours since,
I fancied I was poor.’
‘And, cousin, still
You ’re richer than you fancy. The will says,
Three hundred pounds, and any other sum
Of which the said testatrix dies possessed.
I say she died possessed of other sums.’

‘Dear Romney, need we chronicle the pence ?
I ’m richer than I thought — that ’s evident.
Enough so.’
‘Listen rather. You ’ve to do
With business and a cousin,’ he resumed,
‘And both, I fear, need patience. Here ’s the fact.
The other sum (there *is* another sum,
Unspecified in any will which dates
After possession, yet bequeathed as much
And clearly as those said three hundred pounds)
Is thirty thousand. You will have it paid
When ? . . . where ? My duty troubles you with words.’

He struck the iron when the bar was hot;
No wonder if my eyes sent out some sparks.
‘Pause there ! I thank you. You are delicate
In glozing gifts; — but I, who share your blood,
Am rather made for giving, like yourself,
Than taking, like your pensioners. Farewell.’

He stopped me with a gesture of calm pride.
‘A Leigh,’ he said, ‘gives largesse and gives love,
But glozes never: if a Leigh could gloze,
He would not do it, moreover, to a Leigh,
With blood trained up along nine centuries
To hound and hate a lie from eyes like yours.
And now we ’ll make the rest as clear: your aunt
Possessed these moneys.’

'You will make it clear,
My cousin, as the honor of us both,
Or one of us speaks vainly! that's not I.
My aunt possessed this sum, — inherited
From whom, and when? bring documents, prove dates.'

'Why, now indeed you throw your bonnet off
As if you had time left for a logarithm!
The faith's the want. Dear cousin, give me faith,
And you shall walk this road with silken shoes,
As clean as any lady of our house
Supposed the proudest. Oh, I comprehend
The whole position from your point of sight.
I oust you from your father's halls and lands
And make you poor by getting rich — that's laws;
Considering which, in common circumstance,
You would not scruple to accept from me
Some compensation, some sufficiency
Of income — that were justice; but, alas,
I love you, — that's mere nature; you reject
My love, — that's nature also; and at once,
You cannot, from a suitor disallowed,
A hand thrown back as mine is, into yours
Receive a doit, a farthing, — not for the world!
That's woman's etiquette, and obviously
Exceeds the claim of nature, law, and right,
Unanswerable to all. I grant, you see,
The case as you conceive it, — leave you room
To sweep your ample skirts of womanhood,
While, standing humbly squeezed against the wall,
I own myself excluded from being just,
Restrained from paying indubitable debts,
Because denied from giving you my soul.
That's my misfortune! — I submit to it
As if, in some more reasonable age,
'T would not be less inevitable. Enough.
You'll trust me, cousin, as a gentleman,
To keep your honor, as you count it, pure,
Your scruples (just as if I thought them wise)
Safe and inviolate from gifts of mine.'
I answered mild but earnest. 'I believe
In no one's honor which another keeps,
Nor man's nor woman's. As I keep, myself,
My truth and my religion, I depute
No father, though I had one this side death,
Nor brother, though I had twenty, much less you,
Though twice my cousin, and once Romney Leigh,
To keep my honor pure. You face, to-day,
A man who wants instruction, mark me, not
A woman who wants protection. As to a man,
Show manhood, speak out plainly, be precise
With facts and dates. My aunt inherited
This sum, you say' —
'I said she died possessed
Of this, dear cousin.'
'Not by heritage.
Thank you: we're getting to the facts at last.
Perhaps she played at commerce with a ship
Which came in heavy with Australian gold?
Or touched a lottery with her finger-end,
Which tumbled on a sudden into her lap
Some old Rhine tower or principality?
Perhaps she had to do with a marine
Sub-transatlantic railroad, which pre-pays
As well as pre-supposes? or perhaps
Some stale ancestral debt was after-paid
By a hundred years, and took her by surprise? —
You shake your head, my cousin; I guess ill.'

'You need not guess, Aurora, nor deride;
The truth is not afraid of hurting you.
You'll find no cause, in all your scruples, why
Your aunt should cavil at a deed of gift
'Twixt her and me.'
'I thought so — ah! a gift.'

'You naturally thought so,' he resumed.
'A very natural gift.'
'A gift, a gift!
Her individual life being stranded high
Above all want, approaching opulence,
Too haughty was she to accept a gift
Without some ultimate aim: ah, ah, I see, —

A gift intended plainly for her heirs,
And so accepted . . . if accepted . . . ah,
Indeed that might be; I am snared perhaps
Just so. But, cousin, shall I pardon you,
If thus you have caught me with a cruel springe?'

He answered gently, 'Need you tremble and pant
Like a netted lioness? is 't my fault, mine,
That you 're a grand wild creature of the woods
And hate the stall built for you? Any way,
Though triply netted, need you glare at me?
I do not hold the cords of such a net;
You 're free from me, Aurora!'
'Now may God
Deliver me from this strait! This gift of yours
Was tendered . . . when? accepted . . . when?' I asked.
'A month . . . a fortnight since? Six weeks ago
It was not tendered; by a word she dropped
I know it was not tendered nor received.
When was it? bring your dates.'
'What matters when?
A half-hour ere she died, or a half-year,
Secured the gift, maintains the heritage
Inviolable with law. As easy pluck
The golden stars from heaven's embroidered stole
To pin them on the gray side of this earth,
As make you poor again, thank God.'
'Not poor
Nor clean again from henceforth, you thank God?
Well, sir — I ask you — I insist at need, —
Vouchsafe the special date, the special date.'

'The day before her death-day,' he replied,
'The gift was in her hands. We 'll find that deed,
And certify that date to you.'
As one
Who has climbed a mountain-height and carried up
His own heart climbing, panting in his throat
With the toil of the ascent, takes breath at last,
Looks back in triumph — so I stood and looked.
'Dear cousin Romney, we have reached the top
Of this steep question, and may rest, I think.
But first, — I pray you pardon, that the shock
And surge of natural feeling and event
Has made me oblivious of acquainting you
That this, this letter (unread, mark, still sealed),
Was found enfolded in the poor dead hand:
That spirit of hers had gone beyond the address,
Which could not find her though you wrote it clear, —
I know your writing, Romney, — recognize
The open-hearted *A*, the liberal sweep
Of the *G*. Now listen, — let us understand:
You will not find that famous deed of gift,
Unless you find it in the letter here,
Which, not being mine, I give you back. — Refuse
To take the letter? well then — you and I,
As writer and as heiress, open it
Together, by your leave. — Exactly so:
The words in which the noble offering 's made
Are nobler still, my cousin; and, I own,
The proudest and most delicate heart alive,
Distracted from the measure of the gift
By such a grace in giving, might accept
Your largesse without thinking any more
Of the burthen of it, than King Solomon
Considered, when he wore his holy ring
Charactered over with the ineffable spell,
How many carats of fine gold made up
Its money-value: so, Leigh gives to Leigh!
Or rather, might have given, observe, — for that 's
The point we come to. Here 's a proof of gift,
But here 's no proof, sir, of acceptancy,
But, rather, disproof. Death's black dust, being blown,

Infiltrated through every secret fold
Of this sealed letter by a puff of fate,
Dried up for ever the fresh-written ink,
Annulled the gift, disutilized the grace,
And left these fragments.'
As I spoke, I tore
The paper up and down, and down and up
And crosswise, till it fluttered from my hands,
As forest-leaves, stripped suddenly and rapt
By a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again,
Drop slow, and strew the melancholy ground
Before the amazèd hills . . . why, so, indeed,
I 'm writing like a poet, somewhat large
In the type of the image, and exaggerate
A small thing with a great thing, topping it: —
But then I 'm thinking how his eyes looked, his,
With what despondent and surprised reproach!
I think the tears were in them as he looked;
I think the manly mouth just trembled. Then
He broke the silence.
'I may ask, perhaps,
Although no stranger . . . only Romney Leigh,
Which means still less . . . than Vincent Carrington,
Your plans in going hence, and where you go.
This cannot be a secret.'
'All my life
Is open to you, cousin. I go hence
To London, to the gathering-place of souls,
To live mine straight out, vocally, in books;
Harmoniously for others, if indeed
A woman's soul, like man's, be wide enough
To carry the whole octave (that 's to prove).
Or, if I fail, still purely for myself.
Pray God be with me, Romney.'
'Ah, poor child,
Who fight against the mother's 'tiring hand,
And choose the headsman's! May God change his world
For your sake, sweet, and make it mild as heaven,
And juster than I have found you.'
But I paused.
'And you, my cousin?' —
'I,' he said, — 'you ask?
You care to ask? Well, girls have curious minds
And fain would know the end of everything,
Of cousins therefore with the rest. For me,
Aurora, I 've my work; you know my work;
And, having missed this year some personal hope,
I must beware the rather that I miss
No reasonable duty. While you sing
Your happy pastorals of the meads and trees,
Bethink you that I go to impress and prove
On stifled brains and deafened ears, stunned deaf,
Crushed dull with grief, that nature sings itself,
And needs no mediate poet, lute or voice,
To make it vocal. While you ask of men
Your audience, I may get their leave perhaps
For hungry orphans to say audibly
"We 're hungry, see," — for beaten and bullied wives
To hold their unweaned babies up in sight,
Whom orphanage would better, and for all
To speak and claim their portion . . . by no means
Of the soil, . . . but of the sweat in tilling it;
Since this is nowadays turned privilege,
To have only God's curse on us, and not man's.
Such work I have for doing, elbow-deep
In social problems, — as you tie your rhymes,
To draw my uses to cohere with needs
And bring the uneven world back to its round,
Or, failing so much, fill up, bridge at least
To smoother issues some abysmal cracks
And feuds of earth, intestine heats have made
To keep men separate, — using sorry shifts

Of hospitals, almshouses, infant schools,
And other practical stuff of partial good
You lovers of the beautiful and whole
Despise by system.'
'*I* despise? The scorn
Is yours, my cousin. Poets become such
Through scorning nothing. You decry them for
The good of beauty sung and taught by them,
While they respect your practical partial good
As being a part of beauty's self. Adieu!
When God helps all the workers for his world,
The singers shall have help of Him, not last.'

He smiled as men smile when they will not speak
Because of something bitter in the thought;
And still I feel his melancholy eyes
Look judgment on me. It is seven years since:
I know not if 't was pity or 't was scorn
Has made them so far-reaching: judge it ye
Who have had to do with pity more than love
And scorn than hatred. I am used, since then,
To other ways, from equal men. But so,
Even so, we let go hands, my cousin and I,
And in between us rushed the torrent-world
To blanch our faces like divided rocks,
And bar for ever mutual sight and touch
Except through swirl of spray and all that roar.

THIRD BOOK

'To-day thou girdest up thy loins thyself
And goest where thou wouldest: presently
Others shall gird thee,' said the Lord, 'to go
Where thou wouldst not.' He spoke to Peter thus,
To signify the death which he should die
When crucified head downward.
If He spoke
To Peter then, He speaks to us the same;
The word suits many different martyrdoms,
And signifies a multiform of death,
Although we scarcely die apostles, we,
And have mislaid the keys of heaven and earth.

For 'tis not in mere death that men die most,
And, after our first girding of the loins
In youth's fine linen and fair broidery
To run up hill and meet the rising sun,
We are apt to sit tired, patient as a fool,
While others gird us with the violent bands
Of social figments, feints, and formalisms,
Reversing our straight nature, lifting up
Our base needs, keeping down our lofty thoughts,
Head downward on the cross-sticks of the world.
Yet He can pluck us from that shameful cross.
God, set our feet low and our forehead high,
And show us how a man was made to walk!

Leave the lamp, Susan, and go up to bed.
The room does very well; I have to write
Beyond the stroke of midnight. Get away;
Your steps, for ever buzzing in the room,
Tease me like gnats. Ah, letters! throw them down
At once, as I must have them, to be sure,
Whether I bid you never bring me such
At such an hour, or bid you. No excuse;
You choose to bring them, as I choose perhaps
To throw them in the fire. Now get to bed,
And dream, if possible, I am not cross.

Why what a pettish, petty thing I grow, —
A mere mere woman, a mere flaccid nerve,
A kerchief left out all night in the rain,
Turned soft so, — overtasked and overstrained
And overlived in this close London life!
And yet I should be stronger.
Never burn
Your letters, poor Aurora! for they stare
With red seals from the table, saying each,
'Here 's something that you know not.' Out, alas,
'T is scarcely that the world 's more good and wise

Or even straighter and more consequent
Since yesterday at this time — yet, again,
If but one angel spoke from Ararat
I should be very sorry not to hear:
So open all the letters ! let me read.
Blanche Ord, the writer in the 'Lady's Fan,'
Requests my judgment on . . . that, afterwards.
Kate Ward desires the model of my cloak,
And signs 'Elisha to you.' Pringle Sharpe
Presents his work on 'Social Conduct,' craves
A little money for his pressing debts . . .
From me, who scarce have money for my needs;
Art's fiery chariot which we journey in
Being apt to singe our singing-robes to holes,
Although you ask me for my cloak, Kate Ward !
Here 's Rudgely knows it, — editor and scribe;
He 's 'forced to marry where his heart is not,
Because the purse lacks where he lost his heart.'
Ah, — lost it because no one picked it up;
That 's really loss, — (and passable impudence).
My critic Hammond flatters prettily,
And wants another volume like the last.
My critic Belfair wants another book
Entirely different, which will sell (and live ?),
A striking book, yet not a startling book,
The public blames originalities
(You must not pump spring-water unawares
Upon a gracious public full of nerves):
Good things, not subtle, new yet orthodox,
As easy reading as the dog-eared page
That 's fingered by said public fifty years,
Since first taught spelling by its grandmother,
And yet a revelation in some sort:
That 's hard, my critic Belfair. So — what next ?
My critic Stokes objects to abstract thoughts;
'Call a man John, a woman Joan,' says he,
'And do not prate so of *humanities:*'
Whereat I call my critic simply, Stokes.
My critic Jobson recommends more mirth
Because a cheerful genius suits the times,
And all true poets laugh unquenchably
Like Shakespeare and the gods. That 's very hard.
The gods may laugh, and Shakespeare; Dante smiled
With such a needy heart on two pale lips,
We cry 'Weep rather, Dante.' Poems are
Men, if true poems: and who dares exclaim
At any man's door, 'Here, 'tis understood
The thunder fell last week and killed a wife
And scared a sickly husband — what of that ?
Get up, be merry, shout and clap your hands,
Because a cheerful genius suits the times — ' ?
None says so to the man, and why indeed
Should any to the poem ? A ninth seal;
The apocalypse is drawing to a close.
Ha, — this from Vincent Carrington, — 'Dear friend,
I want good counsel. Will you lend me wings
To raise me to the subject, in a sketch
I 'll bring to-morrow — may I ? at eleven ?
A poet 's only born to turn to use:
So save you ! for the world . . . and Carrington.'
'(Writ after.) Have you heard of Romney Leigh,
Beyond what 's said of him in newspapers,
His phalansteries there, his speeches here,
His pamphlets, pleas, and statements, everywhere ?
He dropped *me* long ago, but no one drops
A golden apple — though indeed one day
You hinted that, but jested. Well, at least
You know Lord Howe who sees him . . . whom he sees
And *you* see and I hate to see, — for Howe
Stands high upon the brink of theories,
Observes the swimmers and cries "Very fine,"
But keeps dry linen equally, — unlike
That gallant breaster, Romney. Strange it is,
Such sudden madness seizing a young man
To make earth over again, — while I 'm content

To make the pictures. Let me bring the sketch.
A tiptoe Danae, overbold and hot,
Both arms aflame to meet her wishing Jove
Halfway, and burn him faster down; the face
And breasts upturned and straining, the loose locks
All glowing with the anticipated gold.
Or here 's another on the self-same theme.
She lies here — flat upon her prison-floor,
The long hair swathed about her to the heel
Like wet seaweed. You dimly see her through
The glittering haze of that prodigious rain,
Half blotted out of nature by a love
As heavy as fate. I 'll bring you either sketch.
I think, myself, the second indicates
More passion.'
Surely. Self is put away,
And calm with abdication. She is Jove,
And no more Danae — greater thus. Perhaps
The painter symbolizes unaware
Two states of the recipient artist-soul,
One, forward, personal, wanting reverence,
Because aspiring only. We 'll be calm,
And know that, when indeed our Joves come down,
We all turn stiller than we have ever been.

Kind Vincent Carrington. I 'll let him come.
He talks of Florence, — and may say a word
Of something as it chanced seven years ago,
A hedgehog in the path, or a lame bird,
In those green country walks, in that good time
When certainly I was so miserable . . .
I seem to have missed a blessing ever since.

The music soars within the little lark,
And the lark soars. It is not thus with men.
We do not make our places with our strains, —
Content, while they rise, to remain behind
Alone on earth instead of so in heaven.
No matter; I bear on my broken tale.

When Romney Leigh and I had parted thus,
I took a chamber up three flights of stairs
Not far from being as steep as some larks climb,
And there, in a certain house in Kensington,
Three years I lived and worked. Get leave to work
In this world — 't is the best you get at all;
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts
Than men in benediction. God says, 'Sweat
For foreheads,' men say 'crowns,' and so we are crowned,
Ay, gashed by some tormenting circle of steel
Which snaps with a secret spring. Get work, get work;
Be sure 't is better than what you work to get.

Serene and unafraid of solitude,
I worked the short days out, — and watched the sun
On lurid morns or monstrous afternoons
(Like some Druidic idol's fiery brass
With fixed unflickering outline of dead heat,
From which the blood of wretches pent inside
Seems oozing forth to incarnadine the air)
Push out through fog with his dilated disk,
And startle the slant roofs and chimney-pots
With splashes of fierce color. Or I saw
Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog
Involve the passive city, strangle it
Alive, and draw it off into the void,
Spires, bridges, streets, and squares, as if a sponge
Had wiped out London, — or as noon and night
Had clapped together and utterly struck out
The intermediate time, undoing themselves
In the act. Your city poets see such things
Not despicable. Mountains of the south,
When drunk and mad with elemental wines
They rend the seamless mist and stand up bare,
Make fewer singers, haply. No one sings,
Descending Sinai: on Parnassus mount

You take a mule to climb and not a muse
Except in fable and figure: forests chant
Their anthems to themselves, and leave you dumb.
But sit in London at the day's decline,
And view the city perish in the mist
Like Pharaoh's armaments in the deep Red Sea,
The chariots, horsemen, footmen, all the host,
Sucked down and choked to silence — then, surprised
By a sudden sense of vision and of tune,
You feel as conquerors though you did not fight,
And you and Israel's other singing girls,
Ay, Miriam with them, sing the song you choose.
I worked with patience, which means almost power:
I did some excellent things indifferently,
Some bad things excellently. Both were praised,
The latter loudest. And by such a time
That I myself had set them down as sins
Scarce worth the price of sackcloth, week by week
Arrived some letter through the sedulous post,
Like these I 've read, and yet dissimilar,
With pretty maiden seals, — initials twined
Of lilies, or a heart marked *Emily*
(Convicting Emily of being all heart);
Or rarer tokens from young bachelors,
Who wrote from college with the same goose-quill,
Suppose, they had just been plucked of, and a snatch
From Horace, 'Collegisse juvat,' set
Upon the first page. Many a letter, signed
Or unsigned, showing the writers at eighteen
Had lived too long, although a muse should help
Their dawn by holding candles, — compliments
To smile or sigh at. Such could pass with me
No more than coins from Moscow circulate
At Paris: would ten roubles buy a tag
Of ribbon on the boulevard, worth a sou?
I smiled that all this youth should love me, — sighed
That such a love could scarcely raise them up
To love what was more worthy than myself;
Then sighed again, again, less generously,
To think the very love they lavished so
Proved me inferior. The strong loved me not,
And he . . . my cousin Romney . . . did not write.
I felt the silent finger of his scorn
Prick every bubble of my frivolous fame
As my breath blew it, and resolve it back
To the air it came from. Oh, I justified
The measure he had taken of my height:
The thing was plain — he was not wrong a line;
I played at art, made thrusts with a toy-sword,
Amused the lads and maidens.
                                        Came a sigh
Deep, hoarse with resolution, — I would work
To better ends, or play in earnest. 'Heavens,
I think I should be almost popular
If this went on!' — I ripped my verses up,
And found no blood upon the rapier's point;
The heart in them was just an embryo's heart
Which never yet had beat, that it should die;
Just gasps of make-believe galvanic life;
Mere tones, inorganized to any tune.

And yet I felt it in me where it burnt,
Like those hot fire-seeds of creation held
In Jove's clenched palm before the worlds were sown, —
But I — I was not Juno even! my hand
Was shut in weak convulsion, woman's ill,
And when I yearned to loose a finger — lo,
The nerve revolted. 'Tis the same even now:
This hand may never, haply, open large,
Before the spark is quenched, or the palm charred,
To prove the power not else than by the pain.

It burnt, it burns — my whole life burnt with it,
And light, not sunlight and not torchlight, flashed
My steps out through the slow and difficult road.

I had grown distrustful of too forward Springs,
The season's books in drear significance
Of morals, dropping round me. Lively books?
The ash has livelier verdure than the yew;
And yet the yew 's green longer, and alone
Found worthy of the holy Christmas time:
We 'll plant more yews if possible, albeit
We plant the graveyards with them.
Day and night
I worked my rhythmic thought, and furrowed up
Both watch and slumber with long lines of life
Which did not suit their season. The rose fell
From either cheek, my eyes globed luminous
Through orbits of blue shadow, and my pulse
Would shudder along the purple-veinèd wrist
Like a shot bird. Youth's stern, set face to face
With youth's ideal: and when people came
And said 'You work too much, you are looking ill,'
I smiled for pity of them who pitied me,
And thought I should be better soon perhaps
For those ill looks. Observe — 'I,' means in youth
Just *I*, the conscious and eternal soul
With all its ends, and not the outside life,
The parcel-man, the doublet of the flesh,
The so much liver, lung, integument,
Which make the sum of 'I' hereafter when
World-talkers talk of doing well or ill.
I prosper if I gain a step, although
A nail then pierced my foot: although my brain
Embracing any truth froze paralyzed,
I prosper: I but change my instrument;
I break the spade off, digging deep for gold,
And catch the mattock up.
I worked on, on.
Through all the bristling fence of nights and days
Which hedges time in from the eternities,
I struggled, — never stopped to note the stakes
Which hurt me in my course. The midnight oil
Would stink sometimes; there came some vulgar needs:
I had to live that therefore I might work,
And, being but poor, I was constrained, for life,
To work with one hand for the booksellers
While working with the other for myself
And art: you swim with feet as well as hands,
Or make small way. I apprehended this, —
In England no one lives by verse that lives;
And, apprehending, I resolved by prose
To make a space to sphere my living verse.
I wrote for cyclopædias, magazines,
And weekly papers, holding up my name
To keep it from the mud. I learnt the use
Of the editorial 'we' in a review
As courtly ladies the fine trick of trains,
And swept it grandly through the open doors
As if one could not pass through doors at all
Save so encumbered. I wrote tales beside,
Carved many an article on cherry-stones
To suit light readers, — something in the lines
Revealing, it was said, the mallet-hand,
But that, I 'll never vouch for: what you do
For bread will taste of common grain, not grapes,
Although you have a vineyard in Champagne;
Much less in Nephelococcygia
As mine was, peradventure.
Having bread
For just so many days, just breathing-room
For body and verse, I stood up straight and worked
My veritable work. And as the soul
Which grows within a child makes the child grow, —
Or as the fiery sap, the touch from God,
Careering through a tree, dilates the bark
And roughs with scale and knob, before it strikes
The summer foliage out in a green flame —

So life, in deepening with me, deepened all
The course I took, the work I did. Indeed
The academic law convinced of sin;
The critics cried out on the falling off,
Regretting the first manner. But I felt
My heart's life throbbing in my verse to show
It lived, it also — certes incomplete,
Disordered with all Adam in the blood,
But even its very tumors, warts and wens
Still organized by and implying life.

A lady called upon me on such a day.
She had the low voice of your English dames,
Unused, it seems, to need rise half a note
To catch attention, — and their quiet mood,
As if they lived too high above the earth
For that to put them out in anything:
So gentle, because verily so proud;
So wary and afraid of hurting you,
By no means that you are not really vile,
But that they would not touch you with their foot
To push you to your place; so self-possessed
Yet gracious and conciliating, it takes
An effort in their presence to speak truth:
You know the sort of woman, — brilliant stuff,
And out of nature. 'Lady Waldemar.'
She said her name quite simply, as if it meant
Not much indeed, but something, — took my hands,
And smiled as if her smile could help my case,
And dropped her eyes on me and let them melt.
'Is this,' she said, 'the Muse'?
'No sybil even,'
I answered, 'since she fails to guess the cause
Which taxed you with this visit, madam.'
'Good,'
She said; 'I value what 's sincere at once.
Perhaps if I had found a literal Muse,
The visit might have taxed me. As it is,
You wear your blue so chiefly in your eyes,
My fair Aurora, in a frank good way,
It comforts me entirely for your fame,
As well as for the trouble of ascent
To this Olympus.'
There, a silver laugh
Ran rippling through her quickened little breaths
The steep stair somewhat justified.
'But still
Your ladyship has left me curious why
You dared the risk of finding the said Muse?'

'Ah, — keep me, notwithstanding, to the point,
Like any pedant? Is the blue in eyes
As awful as in stockings after all,
I wonder, that you 'd have my business out
Before I breathe — exact the epic plunge
In spite of gasps? Well, naturally you think
I 've come here, as the lion-hunters go
To deserts, to secure you with a trap
For exhibition in my drawing-rooms
On zoologic soireés? Not in the least.
Roar softly at me; I am frivolous,
I dare say; I have played at wild-beast shows
Like other women of my class, — but now
I meet my lion simply as Androcles
Met his . . . when at his mercy.'
So, she bent
Her head, as queens may mock, — then lifting up
Her eyelids with a real grave queenly look,
Which ruled and would not spare, not even herself, —
'I think you have a cousin: — Romney Leigh.'

'You bring a word from *him*?' — my eyes leapt up
To the very height of hers, — 'a word from *him*?'

'I bring a word about him, actually.
But first' (she pressed me with her urgent eyes),
'You do not love him, — you?'
'You' re frank at least
In putting questions, madam,' I replied;
'I love my cousin cousinly — no more.'

'I guessed as much. I 'm ready to be frank
In answering also, if you'll question me,
Or even for something less. You stand outside,
You artist women, of the common sex;
You share not with us, and exceed us so

Perhaps by what you ’re mulcted in, your hearts
Being starved to make your heads: so run the old
Traditions of you. I can therefore speak
Without the natural shame which creatures feel
When speaking on their level, to their like.
There ’s many a papist she, would rather die
Than own to her maid she put a ribbon on
To catch the indifferent eye of such a man,
Who yet would count adulteries on her beads
At holy Mary’s shrine and never blush;
Because the saints are so far off, we lose
All modesty before them. Thus, to-day.
’T is *I*, love Romney Leigh.’
‘Forbear,’ I cried.
‘If here ’s no Muse, still less is any saint;
Nor even a friend, that Lady Waldemar
Should make confessions’ . . .
‘That ’s unkindly said:
If no friend, what forbids to make a friend
To join to our confession ere we have done?
I love your cousin. If it seems unwise
To say so, it ’s still foolisher (we ’re frank)
To feel so. My first husband left me young,
And pretty enough, so please you, and rich enough,
To keep my booth in Mayfair with the rest
To happy issues. There are marquises
Would serve seven years to call me wife, I know,
And, after seven, I might consider it,
For there ’s some comfort in a marquisate
When all ’s said, — yes, but after the seven years;
I, now, love Romney. You put up your lip,
So like a Leigh! so like him! — Pardon me,
I ’m well aware I do not derogate
In loving Romney Leigh. The name is good,
The means are excellent, but the man, the man —
Heaven help us both, — I am near as mad as he,
In loving such an one.’
She slowly swung
Her heavy ringlets till they touched her smile,
As reasonably sorry for herself,
And thus continued.
‘Of a truth, Miss Leigh,
I have not, without struggle, come to this.
I took a master in the German tongue,
I gamed a little, went to Paris twice;
But, after all, this love! . . . you eat of love,
And do as vile a thing as if you ate
Of garlic — which, whatever else you eat,
Tastes uniformly acrid, till your peach
Reminds you of your onion. Am I coarse?
Well, love ’s coarse, nature ’s coarse — ah, there ’s the rub.
We fair fine ladies, who park out our lives
From common sheep-paths, cannot help the crows
From flying over, — we ’re as natural still
As Blowsalinda. Drape us perfectly
In Lyons velvet, — we are not, for that,
Lay-figures, look you: we have hearts within,
Warm, live, improvident, indecent hearts,
As ready for outrageous ends and acts
As any distressed sempstress of them all
That Romney groans and toils for. We catch love,
And other fevers, in the vulgar way:
Love will not be outwitted by our wit,
Nor outrun by our equipages: — mine
Persisted, spite of efforts. All my cards
Turned up but Romney Leigh; my German stopped
At germane Wertherism; my Paris rounds
Returned me from the Champs Elysées just
A ghost, and sighing like Dido’s. I came home
Uncured, — convicted rather to myself
Of being in love . . . in love! That ’s coarse, you ’ll say,
I ’m talking garlic.’
Coldly I replied:
‘Apologize for atheism, not love!
For me, I do believe in love, and God.
I know my cousin: Lady Waldemar
I know not: yet I say as much as this, —
Whoever loves him, let her not excuse
But cleanse herself, that, loving such a man,
She may not do it with such unworthy love
He cannot stoop and take it.’
‘That is said
Austerely, like a youthful prophetess,
Who knits her brows across her pretty eyes
To keep them back from following the gray flight

Of doves between the temple-columns. Dear,
Be kinder with me; let us two be friends.
I 'm a mere woman, — the more weak perhaps
Through being so proud; you 're better; as for him,
He 's best. Indeed he builds his goodness up
So high, it topples down to the other side
And makes a sort of badness; there 's the worst
I have to say against your cousin's best!
And so be mild, Aurora, with my worst
For his sake, if not mine.'
'I own myself
Incredulous of confidence like this
Availing him or you.'
'And I, myself,
Of being worthy of him with any love:
In your sense I am not so — let it pass.
And yet I save him if I marry him;
Let that pass too.'
'Pass, pass! we play police
Upon my cousin's life, to indicate
What may or may not pass?' I cried. 'He knows
What 's worthy of him; the choice remains with *him;*
And what he chooses, act or wife, I think
I shall not call unworthy, I, for one.'

''T is somewhat rashly said,' she answered slow;
'Now let 's talk reason, though we talk of love.
Your cousin Romney Leigh 's a monster; there,
The word 's out fairly, let me prove the fact.
We 'll take, say, that most perfect of antiques
They call the Genius of the Vatican
(Which seems too beauteous to endure itself
In this mixed world), and fasten it for once
Upon the torso of the Dancing Faun
(Who might limp surely, if he did not dance),
Instead of Buonarroti's mask: what then?
We show the sort of monster Romney is,
With godlike virtues and heroic aims
Subjoined to limping possibilities
Of mismade human nature. Grant the man
Twice godlike, twice heroic, — still he limps,
And here 's the point we come to.'
'Pardon me,
But, Lady Waldemar, the point 's the thing
We never come to.'
'Caustic, insolent
At need! I like you' — (there, she took my hands)
'And now, my lioness, help Androcles,
For all your roaring. Help me! for myself
I would not say so — but for him. He limps
So certainly, he 'll fall into the pit
A week hence, — so I lose him — so he is lost!
For when he 's fairly married, he a Leigh,
To a girl of doubtful life, undoubtful birth,
Starved out in London till her coarse-grained hands
Are whiter than her morals, — even you
May call his choice unworthy.'
'Married! lost!
He . . . Romney!'
'Ah, you 're moved at last,' she said.
'These monsters, set out in the open sun,
Of course throw monstrous shadows: those who think
Awry, will scarce act straightly. Who but he?
And who but you can wonder? He has been mad,
The whole world knows, since first, a nominal man,
He soured the proctors, tried the gownsmen's wits,
With equal scorn of triangles and wine,
And took no honors, yet was honorable.
They 'll tell you he lost count of Homer's ships
In Melbourne's poor-bills, Ashley's factory bills, —
Ignored the Aspasia we all dare to praise,
For other women, dear, we could not name
Because we 're decent. Well, he had some right
On his side probably; men always have
Who go absurdly wrong. The living boor
Who brews your ale exceeds in vital worth
Dead Cæsar who "stops bungholes" in the cask;

And also, to do good is excellent,
For persons of his income, even to boors:
I sympathize with all such things. But he
Went mad upon them . . . madder and more mad
From college times to these, — as, going down hill,
The faster still, the farther. You must know
Your Leigh by heart: he has sown his black young curls
With bleaching cares of half a million men
Already. If you do not starve, or sin,
You 're nothing to him: pay the income-tax
And break your heart upon 't, he 'll scarce be touched;
But come upon the parish, qualified
For the parish stocks, and Romney will be there
To call you brother, sister, or perhaps
A tenderer name still. Had I any chance
With Mister Leigh, who am Lady Waldemar
And never committed felony?'
'You speak
Too bitterly,' I said, 'for the literal truth.'

'The truth is bitter. Here 's a man who looks
For ever on the ground! you must be low,
Or else a pictured ceiling overhead,
Good painting thrown away. For me, I 've done
What women may — we 're somewhat limited,
We modest women — but I 've done my best.
— How men are perjured when they swear our eyes
Have meaning in them! they 're just blue or brown,
They just can drop their lids a little. And yet
Mine did more, for I read half Fourier through,
Proudhon, Considérant, and Louis Blanc,
With various others of his socialists,
And, if I had been a fathom less in love,
Had cured myself with gaping. As it was,
I quoted from them prettily enough,
Perhaps, to make them sound half rational
To a saner man than he whene'er we talked
(For which I dodged occasion) — learnt by heart
His speeches in the Commons and elsewhere
Upon the social question; heaped reports
Of wicked women and penitentiaries
On all my tables (with a place for Sue),
And gave my name to swell subscription lists
Toward keeping up the sun at nights in heaven,
And other possible ends. All things I did,
Except the impossible . . . such as wearing gowns
Provided by the Ten Hours' movement: there
I stopped — we must stop somewhere. He, meanwhile
Unmoved as the Indian tortoise 'neath the world,
Let all that noise go on upon his back:
He would not disconcert or throw me out,
'T was well to see a woman of my class
With such a dawn of conscience. For the heart,
Made firewood for his sake, and flaming up
To his face, — he merely warmed his feet at it:
Just deigned to let my carriage stop him short
In park or street, — he leaning on the door
With news of the committee which sat last
On pickpockets at suck.'
'You jest — you jest.'

'As martyrs jest, dear (if you read their lives),
Upon the axe which kills them. When all 's done
By me, . . . for him — you 'll ask him presently
The color of my hair — he cannot tell,
Or answers "dark" at random; while, be sure,
He 's absolute on the figure, five or ten,
Of my last subscription. Is it bearable,
And I a woman?'
'Is it reparable,
Though *I* were a man?'
'I know not. That 's to prove.
But, first, this shameful marriage?'
'Ay?' I cried.
'Then really there 's a marriage?'

'Yesterday
I held him fast upon it. "Mister Leigh,"
Said I, "shut up a thing, it makes more noise.
The boiling town keeps secrets ill; I 've known
Yours since last week. Forgive my knowledge so:
You feel I 'm not the woman of the world
The world thinks; you have borne with me before
And used me in your noble work, our work,
And now you shall not cast me off because
You 're at the difficult point, the *join*. 'T is true
Even I can scarce admit the cogency
Of such a marriage . . . where you do not love
(Except the class), yet marry and throw your name
Down to the gutter, for a fire-escape
To future generations ! 't is sublime,
A great example, a true Genesis
Of the opening social era. But take heed,
This virtuous act must have a patent weight,
Or loses half its virtue. Make it tell,
Interpret it, and set it in the light,
And do not muffle it in a winter-cloak
As a vulgar bit of shame, — as if, at best,
A Leigh had made a misalliance and blushed
A Howard should know it." Then, I pressed him more:
"He would not choose," I said, "that even his kin, . . .
Aurora Leigh, even . . . should conceive his act
Less sacrifice, more fantasy." At which
He grew so pale, dear, . . . to the lips, I knew
I had touched him. "Do you know her," he inquired,
"My cousin Aurora?" "Yes," I said, and lied
(But truly we all know you by your books),
And so I offered to come straight to you,
Explain the subject, justify the cause,
And take you with me to Saint Margaret's Court
To see this miracle, this Marian Erle,
This drover's daughter (she 's not pretty, he swears),
Upon whose finger, exquisitely pricked
By a hundred needles, we 're to hang the tie
'Twixt class and class in England, — thus indeed
By such a presence, yours and mine, to lift
The match up from the doubtful place. At once
He thanked me sighing, murmured to himself
"She 'll do it perhaps, she 's noble," — thanked me twice,
And promised, as my guerdon, to put off
His marriage for a month.'
I answered then.
'I understand your drift imperfectly.
You wish to lead me to my cousin's betrothed,
To touch her hand if worthy, and hold her hand
If feeble, thus to justify his match.
So be it then. But how this serves your ends,
And how the strange confession of your love
Serves this, I have to learn — I cannot see.'

She knit her restless forehead. 'Then, despite,
Aurora, that most radiant morning name,
You 're dull as any London afternoon.
I wanted time, and gained it, — wanted *you*,
And gain you ! you will come and see the girl
In whose most prodigal eyes the lineal pearl
And pride of all your lofty race of Leighs
Is destined to solution. Authorized
By sight and knowledge, then, you 'll speak your mind,
And prove to Romney, in your brilliant way,
He 'll wrong the people and posterity
(Say such a thing is bad for me and you,
And you fail utterly), by concluding thus
An execrable marriage. Break it up,
Disroot it — peradventure presently
We 'll plant a better fortune in its place.
Be good to me, Aurora, scorn me less

For saying the thing I should not. Well I know
I should not. I have kept, as others have,
The iron rule of womanly reserve
In lip and life, till now: I wept a week
Before I came here.' — Ending, she was pale;
The last words, haughtily said, were tremulous.
This palfrey pranced in harness, arched her neck,
And, only by the foam upon the bit,
You saw she champed against it.
Then I rose.
'I love love: truth 's no cleaner thing than love.
I comprehend a love so fiery hot
It burns its natural veil of august shame,
And stands sublimely in the nude, as chaste
As Medicean Venus. But I know,
A love that burns through veils will burn through masks
And shrivel up treachery. What, love and lie!
Nay — go to the opera! your love 's curable.'

'I love and lie?' she said — 'I lie, forsooth?'
And beat her taper foot upon the floor,
And smiled against the shoe, — 'You 're hard, Miss Leigh,
Unversed in current phrases. — Bowling greens
Of poets are fresher than the world's highways:
Forgive me that I rashly blew the dust
Which dims our hedges even, in your eyes,
And vexed you so much. You find, probably,
No evil in this marriage, — rather good
Of innocence, to pastoralize in song:
You 'll give the bond your signature, perhaps,
Beneath the lady's work, — indifferent
That Romney chose a wife could write her name,
In witnessing he loved her.'
'Loved!' I cried;
'Who tells you that he wants a wife to love?
He gets a horse to use, not love, I think:
There 's work for wives as well, — and after, straw,
When men are liberal. For myself, you err
Supposing power in me to break this match.
I could not do it to save Romney's life,
And would not to save mine.'
'You take it so,'
She said, 'farewell then. Write your books in peace,
As far as may be for some secret stir
Now obvious to me, — for, most obviously,
In coming hither I mistook the way.'
Whereat she touched my hand and bent her head,
And floated from me like a silent cloud
That leaves the sense of thunder.
I drew breath,
Oppressed in my deliverance. After all,
This woman breaks her social system up
For love, so counted — the love possible
To such, — and lilies are still lilies, pulled
By smutty hands, though spotted from their white;
And thus she is better haply, of her kind,
Than Romney Leigh, who lives by diagrams,
And crosses out the spontaneities
Of all his individual, personal life
With formal universals. As if man
Were set upon a high stool at a desk
To keep God's books for Him in red and black,
And feel by millions! What, if even God
Were chiefly God by living out Himself
To an individualism of the Infinite,
Eterne, intense, profuse, — still throwing up
The golden spray of multitudinous worlds
In measure to the proclive weight and rush
Of his inner nature, — the spontaneous love
Still proof and outflow of spontaneous life?
Then live, Aurora.
Two hours afterward,
Within Saint Margaret's Court I stood alone,
Close-veiled. A sick child, from an ague-fit,
Whose wasted right hand gambled 'gainst his left
With an old brass button in a blot of sun,

Jeered weakly at me as I passed across
The uneven pavement; while a woman, rouged
Upon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief torn,
Thin dangling locks, and flat lascivious mouth,
Cursed at a window both ways, in and out,
By turns some bed-rid creature and myself, —
'Lie still there, mother! liker the dead dog
You 'll be to-morrow. What, we pick our way,
Fine madam, with those damnable small feet!
We cover up our face from doing good,
As if it were our purse! What brings you here,
My lady? Is 't to find my gentleman
Who visits his tame pigeon in the eaves?
Our cholera catch you with its cramps and spasms,
And tumble up your good clothes, veil and all,
And turn your whiteness dead-blue.' I looked up;
I think I could have walked through hell that day,
And never flinched. 'The dear Christ comfort you,'
I said, 'you must have been most miserable
To be so cruel,' — and I emptied out
My purse upon the stones: when, as I had cast
The last charm in the cauldron, the whole court
Went boiling, bubbling up, from all its doors
And windows, with a hideous wail of laughs
And roar of oaths, and blows perhaps . . . I passed
Too quickly for distinguishing . . . and pushed
A little side-door hanging on a hinge,
And plunged into the dark, and groped and climbed
The long, steep, narrow stair 'twixt broken rail
And mildewed wall that let the plaster drop
To startle me in the blackness. Still, up, up!
So high lived Romney's bride. I paused at last
Before a low door in the roof, and knocked.
There came an answer like a hurried dove —
'So soon? can that be Mister Leigh? so soon?'
And, as I entered, an ineffable face
Met mine upon the threshold. 'Oh, not you,
Not you!' — the dropping of the voice implied;
'Then, if not you, for me not any one.'
I looked her in the eyes, and held her hands,
And said 'I am his cousin, — Romney Leigh's;
And here I come to see my cousin too.'
She touched me with her face and with her voice,
This daughter of the people. Such soft flowers
From such rough roots? The people, under there,
Can sin so, curse so, look so, smell so . . . faugh!
Yet have such daughters?
Nowise beautiful
Was Marian Erle. She was not white nor brown,
But could look either, like a mist that changed
According to being shone on more or less:
The hair, too, ran its opulence of curls
In doubt 'twixt dark and bright, nor left you clear
To name the color. Too much hair perhaps
(I 'll name a fault here) for so small a head,
Which seemed to droop on that side and on this,
As a full-blown rose uneasy with its weight
Though not a wind should trouble it. Again,
The dimple in the cheek had better gone
With redder, fuller rounds; and somewhat large
The mouth was, though the milky little teeth
Dissolved it to so infantine a smile.
For soon it smiled at me; the eyes smiled too,

But 't was as if remembering they had wept,
And knowing they should, some day, weep again.

We talked. She told me all her story out,
Which I 'll re-tell with fuller utterance,
As colored and confirmed in after times
By others and herself too. Marian Erle
Was born upon the ledge of Malvern Hill,
To eastward, in a hut built up at night,
To evade the landlord's eye, of mud and turf,
Still liable, if once he looked that way,
To being straight levelled, scattered by his foot,
Like any other anthill. Born, I say;
God sent her to his world, commissioned right,
Her human testimonials fully signed,
Not scant in soul — complete in lineaments;
But others had to swindle her a place
To wail in when she had come. No place for her,
By man's law! born an outlaw was this babe;
Her first cry in our strange and strangling air,
When cast in spasms out by the shuddering womb,
Was wrong against the social code, — forced wrong: —
What business had the baby to cry there?

I tell her story and grow passionate.
She, Marian, did not tell it so, but used
Meek words that made no wonder of herself
For being so sad a creature. 'Mister Leigh
Considered truly that such things should change.
They *will*, in heaven — but meantime, on the earth,
There 's none can like a nettle as a pink,
Except himself. We 're nettles, some of us,
And give offence by the act of springing up;
And, if we leave the damp side of the wall,
The hoes, of course, are on us.' So she said.
Her father earned his life by random jobs
Despised by steadier workmen — keeping swine
On commons, picking hops, or hurrying on
The harvest at wet seasons, or, at need,
Assisting the Welsh drovers, when a drove
Of startled horses plunged into the mist
Below the mountain-road, and sowed the wind
With wandering neighings. In between the gaps
Of such irregular work he drank and slept,
And cursed his wife because, the pence being out,
She could not buy more drink. At which she turned
(The worm), and beat her baby in revenge
For her own broken heart. There 's not a crime
But takes its proper change out still in crime
If once rung on the counter of this world:
Let sinners look to it.
Yet the outcast child,
For whom the very mother's face forwent
The mother's special patience, lived and grew;
Learnt early to cry low, and walk alone,
With that pathetic vacillating roll
Of the infant body on the uncertain feet
(The earth being felt unstable ground so soon),
At which most women's arms unclose at once
With irrepressive instinct. Thus, at three,
This poor weaned kid would run off from the fold,
This babe would steal off from the mother's chair,
And, creeping through the golden walls of gorse,
Would find some keyhole toward the secrecy
Of Heaven's high blue, and, nestling down, peer out —
Oh, not to catch the angels at their games, —
She had never heard of angels, — but to gaze
She knew not why, to see she knew not what,
A-hungering outward from the barren earth
For something like a joy. She liked, she said,

To dazzle black her sight against the sky,
For then, it seemed, some grand blind Love came down,
And groped her out, and clasped her with a kiss;
She learnt God that way, and was beat for it
Whenever she went home, — yet came again,
As surely as the trapped hare, getting free,
Returns to his form. This grand blind Love, she said,
This skyey father and mother both in one,
Instructed her and civilized her more
Than even Sunday-school did afterward,
To which a lady sent her to learn books
And sit upon a long bench in a row
With other children. Well, she laughed sometimes
To see them laugh and laugh and maul their texts;
But ofter she was sorrowful with noise
And wondered if their mothers beat them hard
That ever they should laugh so. There was one
She loved indeed, — Rose Bell, a seven years' child,
So pretty and clever, who read syllables
When Marian was at letters; *she* would laugh
At nothing — hold your finger up, she laughed,
Then shook her curls down over eyes and mouth
To hide her make-mirth from the schoolmaster:
And Rose's pelting glee, as frank as rain
On cherry-blossoms, brightened Marian too,
To see another merry whom she loved.
She whispered once (the children side by side,
With mutual arms entwined about their necks)
'Your mother lets you laugh so?' 'Ay,' said Rose,
'She lets me. She was dug into the ground
Six years since, I being but a yearling wean.
Such mothers let us play and lose our time,
And never scold nor beat us! Don't you wish
You had one like that?' There, Marian breaking off
Looked suddenly in my face. 'Poor Rose,' said she,
'I heard her laugh last night in Oxford Street.
I'd pour out half my blood to stop that laugh.
Poor Rose, poor Rose!' said Marian.
She resumed.
It tried her, when she had learnt at Sunday-school
What God was, what He wanted from us all,
And how in choosing sin we vexed the Christ,
To go straight home and hear her father pull
The Name down on us from the thunder-shelf,
Then drink away his soul into the dark
From seeing judgment. Father, mother, home,
Were God and heaven reversed to her: the more
She knew of Right, the more she guessed their wrong:
Her price paid down for knowledge, was to know
The vileness of her kindred: through her heart,
Her filial and tormented heart, henceforth,
They struck their blows at virtue. Oh, 't is hard
To learn you have a father up in heaven
By a gathering certain sense of being, on earth,
Still worse than orphaned: 't is too heavy a grief,
The having to thank God for such a joy!

And so passed Marian's life from year to year.
Her parents took her with them when they tramped,
Dodged lanes and heaths, frequented towns and fairs,
And once went farther and saw Manchester,
And once the sea, that blue end of the world,
That fair scroll-finis of a wicked book, —
And twice a prison, — back at intervals,
Returning to the hills. Hills draw like heaven.

And stronger sometimes, holding out their hands
To pull you from the vile flats up to them.
And though perhaps these strollers still strolled back,
As sheep do, simply that they knew the way,
They certainly felt bettered unaware
Emerging from the social smut of towns
To wipe their feet clean on the mountain turf.
In which long wanderings, Marian lived and learned,
Endured and learned. The people on the roads
Would stop and ask her why her eyes outgrew
Her cheeks, and if she meant to lodge the birds
In all that hair; and then they lifted her,
The miller in his cart, a mile or twain,
The butcher's boy on horseback. Often too
The pedler stopped, and tapped her on the head
With absolute forefinger, brown and ringed,
And asked if peradventure she could read,
And when she answered 'ay,' would toss her down
Some stray odd volume from his heavy pack,
A Thomson's Seasons, mulcted of the Spring,
Or half a play of Shakespeare's torn across
(She had to guess the bottom of a page
By just the top sometimes, — as difficult,
As, sitting on the moon, to guess the earth!),
Or else a sheaf of leaves (for that small Ruth's
Small gleanings) torn out from the heart of books,
From Churchyard Elegies and Edens Lost,
From Burns, and Bunyan, Selkirk, and Tom Jones, —
'T was somewhat hard to keep the things distinct,
And oft the jangling influence jarred the child
Like looking at a sunset full of grace
Through a pothouse window while the drunken oaths
Went on behind her. But she weeded out
Her book-leaves, threw away the leaves that hurt
(First tore them small, that none should find a word),
And made a nosegay of the sweet and good
To fold within her breast, and pore upon
At broken moments of the noontide glare,
When leave was given her to untie her cloak
And rest upon the dusty highway's bank
From the road's dust: or oft, the journey done,
Some city friend would lead her by the hand
To hear a lecture at an institute.
And thus she had grown, this Marian Erle of ours,
To no book-learning, — she was ignorant
Of authors, — not in earshot of the things
Outspoken o'er the heads of common men
By men who are uncommon, — but within
The cadenced hum of such, and capable
Of catching from the fringes of the wing
Some fragmentary phrases, here and there,
Of that fine music, — which, being carried in
To her soul, had reproduced itself afresh
In finer motions of the lips and lids.

She said, in speaking of it, 'If a flower
Were thrown you out of heaven at intervals,
You 'd soon attain to a trick of looking up, —
And so with her.' She counted me her years,
Till *I* felt old; and then she counted me
Her sorrowful pleasures, till I felt ashamed.
She told me she was fortunate and calm
On such and such a season, sat and sewed,
With no one to break up her crystal thoughts,
While rhymes from lovely poems span around
Their ringing circles of ecstatic tune,
Beneath the moistened finger of the Hour.
Her parents called her a strange, sickly child,
Not good for much, and given to sulk and stare,
And smile into the hedges and the clouds,
And tremble if one shook her from her fit
By any blow, or word even. Out-door jobs
Went ill with her, and household quiet work
She was not born to. Had they kept the north,
They might have had their pennyworth out of her,
Like other parents, in the factories

(Your children work for you, not you for them,
Or else they better had been choked with air
The first breath drawn); but, in this tramping life,
Was nothing to be done with such a child
But tramp and tramp. And yet she knitted hose
Not ill, and was not dull at needlework;
And all the country people gave her pence
For darning stockings past their natural age,
And patching petticoats from old to new,
And other light work done for thrifty wives.

One day, said Marian — the sun shone that day —
Her mother had been badly beat, and felt
The bruises sore about her wretched soul
(That must have been): she came in suddenly,
And snatching in a sort of breathless rage
Her daughter's headgear comb, let down the hair
Upon her like a sudden waterfall,
Then drew her drenched and passive by the arm
Outside the hut they lived in. When the child
Could clear her blinded face from all that stream
Of tresses . . . there, a man stood, with beast's eyes
That seemed as they would swallow her alive
Complete in body and spirit, hair and all, —
And burning stertorous breath that hurt her cheek,
He breathed so near. The mother held her tight,
Saying hard between her teeth — 'Why wench, why wench,
The squire speaks to you now — the squire 's too good:
He means to set you up and comfort us.
Be mannerly at least.' The child turned round
And looked up piteous in the mother's face
(Be sure that mother's death-bed will not want
Another devil to damn, than such a look),
'Oh, mother!' then, with desperate glance to heaven,
'God, free me from my mother,' she shrieked out,
'These mothers are too dreadful.' And, with force
As passionate as fear, she tore her hands,
Like lilies from the rocks, from hers and his,
And sprang down, bounded headlong down the steep,
Away from both — away, if possible,
As far as God, — away! They yelled at her,
As famished hounds at a hare. She heard them yell;
She felt her name hiss after her from the hills,
Like shot from guns. On, on. And now she had cast
The voices off with the uplands. On. Mad fear
Was running in her feet and killing the ground;
The white roads curled as if she burnt them up,
The green fields melted, wayside trees fell back
To make room for her. Then her head grew vexed;
Trees, fields, turned on her and ran after her;
She heard the quick pants of the hills behind,
Their keen air pricked her neck: she had lost her feet,
Could run no more, yet somehow went as fast,
The horizon red 'twixt steeples in the east
So sucked her forward, forward, while her heart
Kept swelling, swelling, till it swelled so big
It seemed to fill her body, — when it burst
And overflowed the world and swamped the light;
'And now I am dead and safe,' thought Marian Erle —
She had dropped, she had fainted.
                    As the sense returned,
The night had passed — not life's night. She was 'ware
Of heavy tumbling motions, creaking wheels,
The driver shouting to the lazy team
That swung their rankling bells against her brain,

While, through the wagon's coverture and chinks,
The cruel yellow morning pecked at her
Alive or dead upon the straw inside, —
At which her soul ached back into the dark
And prayed, 'no more of that.' A wagoner
Had found her in a ditch beneath the moon,
As white as moonshine save for the oozing blood.
At first he thought her dead; but when he had wiped
The mouth and heard it sigh, he raised her up,
And laid her in his wagon in the straw,
And so conveyed her to the distant town
To which his business called himself, and left
That heap of misery at the hospital.

She stirred; — the place seemed new and strange as death.
The white strait bed, with others strait and white,
Like graves dug side by side at measured lengths,
And quiet people walking in and out
With wonderful low voices and soft steps
And apparitional equal care for each,
Astonished her with order, silence, law.
And when a gentle hand held out a cup,
She took it, as you do at sacrament,
Half awed, half melted, — not being used, indeed,
To so much love as makes the form of love
And courtesy of manners. Delicate drinks
And rare white bread, to which some dying eyes
Were turned in observation. O my God,
How sick we must be, ere we make men just!
I think it frets the saints in heaven to see
How many desolate creatures on the earth
Have learnt the simple dues of fellowship
And social comfort, in a hospital,
As Marian did. She lay there, stunned, half tranced,
And wished, at intervals of growing sense,
She might be sicker yet, if sickness made
The world so marvellous kind, the air so hushed,
And all her wake-time quiet as a sleep;
For now she understood (as such things were)
How sickness ended very oft in heaven
Among the unspoken raptures: — yet more sick,
And surelier happy. Then she dropped her lids,
And, folding up her hands as flowers at night,
Would lose no moment of the blessèd time.

She lay and seethed in fever many weeks,
But youth was strong and overcame the test;
Revolted soul and flesh were reconciled
And fetched back to the necessary day
And daylight duties. She could creep about
The long bare rooms, and stare out drearily
From any narrow window on the street,
Till some one who had nursed her as a friend
Said coldly to her, as an enemy,
'She had leave to go next week, being well enough'
(While only her heart ached). 'Go next week,' thought she:
'Next week! how would it be with her next week,
Let out into that terrible street alone
Among the pushing people, . . . to go . . . where?'

One day, the last before the dreaded last,
Among the convalescents, like herself
Prepared to go next morning, she sat dumb,
And heard half absently the women talk, —
How one was famished for her baby's cheeks,
'The little wretch would know her! a year old
And lively, like his father!' — one was keen
To get to work, and fill some clamorous mouths;
And one was tender for her dear goodman
Who had missed her sorely, — and one, querulous . . .
'Would pay backbiting neighbors who had dared
To talk about her as already dead,' —
And one was proud . . . 'and if her sweetheart Luke

Had left her for a ruddier face than hers
(The gossip would be seen through at a glance),
Sweet riddance of such sweethearts — let him hang!
'T were good to have been sick for such an end.'

And while they talked, and Marian felt the worse
For having missed the worst of all their wrongs,
A visitor was ushered through the wards
And paused among the talkers. 'When he looked
It was as if he spoke, and when he spoke
He sang perhaps,' said Marian; 'could she tell?
She only knew' (so much she had chronicled,
As seraphs might the making of the sun)
'That he who came and spake was Romney Leigh,
And then and there she saw and heard him first.'

And when it was her turn to have the face
Upon her, all those buzzing pallid lips
Being satisfied with comfort — when he changed
To Marian, saying 'And *you?* you 're going, where?' —
She, moveless as a worm beneath a stone
Which some one's stumbling foot has spurned aside,
Writhed suddenly, astonished with the light,
And, breaking into sobs, cried 'Where I go?
None asked me till this moment. Can I say
Where *I* go, — when it has not seemed worth while
To God Himself, who thinks of every one,
To think of me and fix where I shall go?'

'So young,' he gently asked her, 'you have lost
Your father and your mother?'
'Both,' she said,
'Both lost! my father was burnt up with gin
Or ever I sucked milk, and so is lost.
My mother sold me to a man last month,
And so my mother's lost, 't is manifest.
And I, who fled from her for miles and miles,
As if I had caught sight of the fire of hell
Through some wild gap (she was my mother, sir),
It seems I shall be lost too, presently,
And so we end, all three of us.'
'Poor child,'
He said, — with such a pity in his voice,
It soothed her more than her own tears, — 'poor child!
'T is simple that betrayal by mother's love
Should bring despair of God's too. Yet be taught,
He 's better to us than many mothers are,
And children cannot wander beyond reach
Of the sweep of his white raiment. Touch and hold!
And if you weep still, weep where John was laid
While Jesus loved him.'
'She could say the words,'
She told me, 'exactly as he uttered them
A year back, since in any doubt or dark
They came out like the stars, and shone on her
With just their comfort. Common words, perhaps;
The ministers in church might say the same;
But *he*, he made the church with what he spoke, —
The difference was the miracle,' said she.

Then catching up her smile to ravishment,
She added quickly, 'I repeat his words,
But not his tones: can any one repeat
The music of an organ, out of church?
And when he said "poor child," I shut my eyes
To feel how tenderly his voice broke through,
As the ointment-box broke on the Holy feet
To let out the rich medicative nard.'

She told me how he had raised and rescued her
With reverent pity, as, in touching grief,
He touched the wounds of Christ, — and made her feel
More self-respecting. Hope he called belief
In God, — work, worship, — therefore let us pray!
And thus, to snatch her soul from atheism,

And keep it stainless from her mother's face.
He sent her to a famous sempstress-house
Far off in London, there to work and hope.

With that they parted. She kept sight of Heaven,
But not of Romney. He had good to do
To others: through the days and through the nights
She sewed and sewed and sewed. She drooped sometimes,
And wondered, while along the tawny light
She struck the new thread into her needle's eye,
How people without mothers on the hills
Could choose the town to live in! — then she drew
The stitch, and mused how Romney's face would look,
And if 't were likely he 'd remember hers
When they two had their meeting after death.

FOURTH BOOK

They met still sooner. 'T was a year from thence
That Lucy Gresham, the sick sempstress girl,
Who sewed by Marian's chair so still and quick,
And leant her head upon its back to cough
More freely, when, the mistress turning round,
The others took occasion to laugh out,
Gave up at last. Among the workers, spoke
A bold girl with black eyebrows and red lips:
'You know the news? Who 's dying, do you think?
Our Lucy Gresham. I expected it
As little as Nell Hart's wedding. Blush not, Nell,
Thy curls be red enough without thy cheeks,
And, some day, there 'll be found a man to dote
On red curls. — Lucy Gresham swooned last night,
Dropped sudden in the street while going home;
And now the baker says, who took her up
And laid her by her grandmother in bed,
He 'll give her a week to die in. Pass the silk.
Let 's hope he gave her a loaf too, within reach,
For otherwise they 'll starve before they die,
That funny pair of bedfellows! Miss Bell,
I'll thank you for the scissors. The old crone
Is paralytic — that 's the reason why
Our Lucy's thread went faster than her breath,
Which went too quick, we all know. Marian Erle,
Why, Marian Erle, you 're not the fool to cry?
Your tears spoil Lady Waldemar's new dress,
You piece of pity!'
Marian rose up straight,
And, breaking through the talk and through the work,
Went outward, in the face of their surprise,
To Lucy's home, to nurse her back to life
Or down to death. She knew, by such an act,
All place and grace were forfeit in the house,
Whose mistress would supply the missing hand
With necessary, not inhuman haste,
And take no blame. But pity, too, had dues:
She could not leave a solitary soul
To founder in the dark, while she sat still
And lavished stitches on a lady's hem
As if no other work were paramount.
'Why, God,' thought Marian, 'has a missing hand
This moment; Lucy wants a drink, perhaps.
Let others miss me! never miss me, God!'

So Marian sat by Lucy's bed, content
With duty, and was strong, for recompense,
To hold the lamp of human love arm-high,
To catch the death-strained eyes and comfort them,
Until the angels, on the luminous side

Of death, had got theirs ready. And she said,
If Lucy thanked her sometimes, called her kind,
It touched her strangely. 'Marian Erle called kind!
What, Marian, beaten and sold, who could not die!
'T is verily good fortune to be kind.
Ah you,' she said, 'who are born to such a grace,
Be sorry for the unlicensed class, the poor,
Reduced to think the best good fortune means
That others, simply, should be kind to them.'

From sleep to sleep when Lucy had slid away
o gently, like the light upon a hill,
Of which none names the moment that it goes
Though all see when 't is gone, — a man came in
And stood beside the bed. The old idiot wretch
creamed feebly, like a baby overlain,
Sir, sir, you won't mistake me for the corpse?
Don't look at *me*, sir! never bury *me!*
Although I lie here, I'm alive as you,
Except my legs and arms, — I eat and drink
And understand, — (that you 're the gentleman
Who fits the funerals up, Heaven speed you, sir),
And certainly I should be livelier still
If Lucy here . . . sir, Lucy is the corpse . . .
Had worked more properly to buy me wine;
But Lucy, sir, was always slow at work,
shan't lose much by Lucy. Marian Erle,
Speak up and show the gentleman the corpse.'

And then a voice said 'Marian Erle.' She rose;
It was the hour for angels — there, stood hers!
She scarcely marvelled to see Romney Leigh.
As light November snows to empty nests,
As grass to graves, as moss to mildewed stones,
As July suns to ruins, through the rents,
As ministering spirits to mourners, through a loss,
As Heaven itself to men, through pangs of death,
He came uncalled wherever grief had come.
'And so,' said Marian Erle, 'we met anew,'
And added softly, 'so, we shall not part.'

He was not angry that she had left the house
Wherein he placed her. Well — she had feared it might
Have vexed him. Also, when he found her set
On keeping, though the dead was out of sight,
That half-dead, half-alive body left behind
With cankerous heart and flesh, which took your best
And cursed you for the little good it did
(Could any leave the bed-rid wretch alone,
So joyless she was thankless even to God,
Much more to you?), he did not say 't was well,
Yet Marian thought he did not take it ill, —
Since day by day he came, and every day
She felt within his utterance and his eyes
A closer, tenderer presence of the soul,
Until at last he said 'We shall not part.'

On that same day was Marian's work complete:
She had smoothed the empty bed, and swept the floor
Of coffin sawdust, set the chairs anew
The dead had ended gossip in, and stood
In that poor room so cold and orderly,
The door-key in her hand, prepared to go
As *they* had, howbeit not their way. He spoke.

'Dear Marian, of one clay God made us all,
And though men push and poke and paddle in 't
(As children play at fashioning dirt-pies)
And call their fancies by the name of facts,
Assuming difference, lordship, privilege,
When all 's plain dirt, — they come back to it at last,

The first grave-digger proves it with a spade,
And pats all even. Need we wait for this,
You, Marian, and I, Romney?'
She, at that,
Looked blindly in his face, as when one looks
Through driving autumn-rains to find the sky.
He went on speaking.
'Marian, I being born
What men call noble, and you, issued from
The noble people, — though the tyrannous sword,
Which pierced Christ's heart, has cleft the world in twain
'Twixt class and class, opposing rich to poor,
Shall *we* keep parted? Not so. Let us lean
And strain together rather, each to each,
Compress the red lips of this gaping wound
As far as two souls can, — ay, lean and league,
I from my superabundance, — from your want
You, — joining in a protest 'gainst the wrong
On both sides.'
All the rest, he held her hand
In speaking, which confused the sense of much.
Her heart against his words beat out so thick,
They might as well be written on the dust
Where some poor bird, escaping from hawk's beak,
Has dropped and beats its shuddering wings, — the lines
Are rubbed so, — yet 't was something like to this,
— 'That they two, standing at the two extremes
Of social classes, had received one seal,
Been dedicate and drawn beyond themselves
To mercy and ministration, — he, indeed,
Through what he knew, and she, through what she felt,
He, by man's conscience, she, by woman's heart,
Relinquishing their several 'vantage posts
Of wealthy ease and honorable toil,
To work with God at love. And since God willed
That putting out his hand to touch this ark
He found a woman's hand there, he'd accept
The sign too, hold the tender fingers fast,
And say "My fellow-worker, be my wife!"'

She told the tale with simple, rustic turns, —
Strong leaps of meaning in her sudden eyes
That took the gaps of any imperfect phrase
Of the unschooled speaker: I have rather writ
The thing I understood so, than the thing
I heard so. And I cannot render right
Her quick gesticulation, wild yet soft,
Self-startled from the habitual mood she used,
Half sad, half languid, — like dumb creatures (now
A rustling bird, and now a wandering deer,
Or squirrel 'gainst the oak-gloom flashing up
His sidelong burnished head, in just her way
Of savage spontaneity), that stir
Abruptly the green silence of the woods,
And make it stranger, holier, more profound;
As Nature's general heart confessed itself
Of life, and then fell backward on repose.

I kissed the lips that ended. — 'So indeed
He loves you, Marian?'
'Loves me!' She looked up
With a child's wonder when you ask him first
Who made the sun — a puzzled blush, that grew,
Then broke off in a rapid radiant smile
Of sure solution. 'Loves me! he loves all, —
And me, of course. He had not asked me else
To work with him for ever and be his wife.'

Her words reproved me. This perhaps was love —
To have its hands too full of gifts to give,
For putting out a hand to take a gift;
To love so much, the perfect round of love

Includes, in strict conclusion, being loved;
As Eden-dew went up and fell again,
Enough for watering Eden. Obviously
She had not thought about his love at all:
The cataracts of her soul had poured themselves,
And risen self-crowned in rainbow: would she ask
Who crowned her? — it sufficed that she was crowned.
With women of my class ’t is otherwise:
We haggle for the small change of our gold,
And so much love accord for so much love,
Rialto-prices. Are we therefore wrong?
If marriage be a contract, look to it then,
Contracting parties should be equal, just;
But if, a simple fealty on one side,
A mere religion, — right to give, is all,
And certain brides of Europe duly ask
To mount the pile as Indian widows do,
The spices of their tender youth heaped up,
The jewels of their gracious virtues worn,
More gems, more glory, — to consume entire
For a living husband: as the man ’s alive,
Not dead, the woman’s duty by so much
Advanced in England beyond Hindostan.

I sat there musing, till she touched my hand
With hers, as softly as a strange white bird
She feared to startle in touching. ‘You are kind,
But are you, peradventure, vexed at heart
Because your cousin takes me for a wife?
I know I am not worthy — nay, in truth,
I ’m glad on ’t, since, for that, he chooses me.
He likes the poor things of the world the best;
I would not therefore, if I could, be rich.
It pleasures him to stoop for buttercups;
I would not be a rose upon the wall
A queen might stop at, near the palace-door,
To say to a courtier, “Pluck that rose for me,
It ’s prettier than the rest.” O Romney Leigh!
I ’d rather far be trodden by his foot,
Than lie in a great queen’s bosom.’
                                        Out of breath,
She paused.
            ‘Sweet Marian, do you disavow
The roses with that face?’
                              She dropped her head
As if the wind had caught that flower of her
And bent it in the garden, — then looked up
With grave assurance. ‘Well, you think me bold!
But so we all are, when we ’re praying God.
And if I ’m bold — yet, lady, credit me,
That, since I know myself for what I am,
Much fitter for his handmaid than his wife,
I ’ll prove the handmaid and the wife at once,
Serve tenderly, and love obediently,
And be a worthier mate, perhaps, than some
Who are wooed in silk among their learned books;
While I shall set myself to read his eyes,
Till such grow plainer to me than the French
To wisest ladies. Do you think I ’ll miss
A letter, in the spelling of his mind?
No more than they do when they sit and write
Their flying words with flickering wild-fowl tails,
Nor ever pause to ask how many *t*’s,
Should that be *y* or *i*, they know ’t so well:
I ’ve seen them writing, when I brought a dress
And waited, — floating out their soft white hands
On shining paper. But they ’re hard, sometimes,
For all those hands! — we ’ve used out many nights,
And worn the yellow daylight into shreds
Which flapped and shivered down our aching eyes
Till night appeared more tolerable, just
That pretty ladies might look beautiful,
Who said at last . . . “You ’re lazy in that house!
You ’re slow in sending home the work, — I count
I ’ve waited near an hour for ’t.” Pardon me,
I do not blame them, madam, nor misprize

They are fair and gracious; ay, but not like you,
Since none but you has Mister Leigh's own blood,
Both noble and gentle, — and, without it . . . well,
They are fair, I said; so fair, it scarce seems strange
That, flashing out in any looking-glass
The wonder of their glorious brows and breasts,
They 're charmed so, they forget to look behind
And mark how pale we 've grown, we pitiful
Remainders of the world. And so perhaps
If Mister Leigh had chosen a wife from these,
She might, although he 's better than her best
And dearly she would know it, steal a thought
Which should be all his, an eye-glance from his face,
To plunge into the mirror opposite
In search of her own beauty's pearl; while *I* . . .
Ah, dearest lady, serge will outweigh silk
For winter-wear when bodies feel a-cold,
And I 'll be a true wife to your cousin Leigh.'

Before I answered he was there himself.
I think he had been standing in the room
And listened probably to half her talk,
Arrested, turned to stone, — as white as stone.
Will tender sayings make men look so white?
He loves her then profoundly.
                                        'You are here,
Aurora? Here I meet you!' — We clasped hands.

'Even so, dear Romney. Lady Waldemar
Has sent me in haste to find a cousin of mine
Who shall be.'
                        'Lady Waldemar is good.'

'Here 's one, at least, who is good,' I sighed, and touched
Poor Marian's happy head, as doglike she,
Most passionately patient, waited on,
A-tremble for her turn of greeting words;
'I 've sat a full hour with your Marian Erle,
And learnt the thing by heart, — and from my heart
Am therefore competent to give you thanks
For such a cousin.'
                                'You accept at last
A gift from me, Aurora, without scorn?
At last I please you?' — How his voice was changed.

'You cannot please a woman against her will,
And once you vexed me. Shall we speak of that?
We 'll say, then, you were noble in it all,
And I not ignorant — let it pass! And now
You please me, Romney, when you please yourself;
So, please you, be fanatical in love,
And I 'm well pleased. Ah, cousin! at the old hall,
Among the gallery portraits of our Leighs,
We shall not find a sweeter signory
Than this pure forehead's.'
                                        Not a word he said.
How arrogant men are! — Even philanthropists,
Who try to take a wife up in the way
They put down a subscription-cheque, — if once
She turns and says 'I will not tax you so,
Most charitable sir,' — feel ill at ease
As though she had wronged them somehow. I suppose
We women should remember what we are,
And not throw back an obolus inscribed
With Cæsar's image, lightly. I resumed.

'It strikes me, some of those sublime Vandykes
Were not too proud to make good saints in heaven;
And if so, then they 're not too proud to-day,
To bow down (now the ruffs are off their necks)
And own this good, true, noble Marian, yours,
And mine, I 'll say! — For poets (bear the word),
Half-poets even, are still whole democrats, —
Oh, not that we 're disloyal to the high,
But loyal to the low, and cognizant

Of the less scrutable majesties. For me,
I comprehend your choice, I justify
Your right in choosing.'
'No, no, no,' he sighed,
With a sort of melancholy, impatient scorn,
As some grown man who never had a child
Puts by some child who plays at being a man,
'You did not, do not, cannot comprehend
My choice, my ends, my motives, nor myself:
No matter now; we 'll let it pass, you say.
I thank you for your generous cousinship
Which helps this present; I accept for her
Your favorable thoughts. We 're fallen on days,
We two who are not poets, when to wed
Requires less mutual love than common love
For two together to bear out at once
Upon the loveless many. Work in pairs,
In galley-couplings or in marriage-rings,
The difference lies in the honor, not the work, —
And such we 're bound to, I and she. But love
(You poets are benighted in this age,
The hour 's too late for catching even moths,
You 've gnats instead), love! — love's fool-paradise
Is out of date, like Adam's. Set a swan
To swim the Trenton, rather than true love
To float its fabulous plumage safely down
The cataracts of this loud transition-time, —
Whose roar for ever henceforth in my ears
Must keep me deaf to music.'
There, I turned
And kissed poor Marian, out of discontent.
The man had baffled, chafed me, till I flung
For refuge to the woman, — as, sometimes,
Impatient of some crowded room's close smell,
You throw a window open and lean out
To breathe a long breath in the dewy night
And cool your angry forehead. She, at least,
Was not built up as walls are, brick by brick,
Each fancy squared, each feeling ranged by line,
The very heat of burning youth applied
To indurate form and system! excellent bricks,
A well-built wall, — which stops you on the road,
And into which you cannot see an inch
Although you beat your head against it — pshaw!

'Adieu,' I said, 'for this time, cousins both,
And, cousin Romney, pardon me the word,
Be happy! — oh, in some esoteric sense
Of course! — I mean no harm in wishing well.
Adieu, my Marian: — may she come to me,
Dear Romney, and be married from my house?
It is not part of your philosophy
To keep your bird upon the blackthorn?'
'Ay,'
He answered, 'but it is. I take my wife
Directly from the people, — and she comes,
As Austria's daughter to imperial France,
Betwixt her eagles, blinking not her race,
From Margaret's Court at garret-height, to meet
And wed me at Saint James's, nor put off
Her gown of serge for that. The things we do,
We do: we 'll wear no mask, as if we blushed.'
'Dear Romney, you 're the poet,' I replied,
But felt my smile too mournful for my word,
And turned and went. Ay, masks, I thought, — beware
Of tragic masks we tie before the glass,
Uplifted on the cothurn half a yard
Above the natural stature! we would play
Heroic parts to ourselves, — and end, perhaps,
As impotently as Athenian wives
Who shrieked in fits at the Eumenides.

His foot pursued me down the stair. 'At least
You 'll suffer me to walk with you beyond
These hideous streets, these graves, where men alive
Packed close with earthworms, burr unconsciously
About the plague that slew them; let me go,
The very women pelt their souls in mud
At any woman who walks here alone.
How came you here alone? — you are ignorant.'

We had a strange and melancholy walk:
The night came drizzling downward in dark rain,
And, as we walked, the color of the time,
The act, the presence, my hand upon his arm,
His voice in my ear, and mine to my own sense,
Appeared unnatural. We talked modern books
And daily papers, Spanish marriage-schemes
And English climate — was 't so cold last year?
And will the wind change by to-morrow morn?
Can Guizot stand? is London full? is trade
Competitive? has Dickens turned his hinge
A-pinch upon the fingers of the great?
And are potatoes to grow mythical
Like moly? will the apple die out too?
Which way is the wind to-night? south-east? due east?

We talked on fast, while every common word
Seemed tangled with the thunder at one end,
And ready to pull down upon our heads
A terror out of sight. And yet to pause
Were surelier mortal: we tore greedily up
All silence, all the innocent breathing-points,
As if, like pale conspirators in haste,
We tore up papers where our signatures
Imperilled us to an ugly shame or death.

I cannot tell you why it was. 'T is plain
We had not loved nor hated: wherefore dread
To spill gunpowder on ground safe from fire?
Perhaps we had lived too closely, to diverge
So absolutely: leave two clocks, they say,
Wound up to different hours, upon one shelf,
And slowly, through the interior wheels of each,
The blind mechanic motion sets itself
A-throb to feel out for the mutual time.
It was not so with us, indeed: while he
Struck midnight, I kept striking six at dawn;
While he marked judgment, I, redemption-day;
And such exception to a general law
Imperious upon inert matter even,
Might make us, each to either, insecure,
A beckoning mystery or a troubling fear.

I mind me, when we parted at the door,
How strange his good-night sounded, — like good-night
Beside a deathbed, where the morrow's sun
Is sure to come too late for more good-days:
And all that night I thought . . . 'Good-night,' said he.

And so, a month passed. Let me set it down
At once, — I have been wrong, I have been wrong.
We are wrong always when we think too much
Of what we think or are: albeit our thoughts
Be verily bitter as self-sacrifice,
We 're no less selfish. If we sleep on rocks
Or roses, sleeping past the hour of noon
We 're lazy. This I write against myself.
I had done a duty in the visit paid
To Marian, and was ready otherwise
To give the witness of my presence and name
Whenever she should marry. — Which, I thought,
Sufficed. I even had cast into the scale
An overweight of justice toward the match;
The Lady Waldemar had missed her tool,
Had broken it in the lock as being too straight
For a crooked purpose, while poor Marian Erle
Missed nothing in my accents or my acts:
I had not been ungenerous on the whole,
Nor yet untender; so, enough. I felt
Tired, overworked: this marriage somewhat jarred;
Or, if it did not, all the bridal noise,
The pricking of the map of life with pins,
In schemes of . . . 'Here we 'll go,' and 'There we 'll stay,'

And ‘Everywhere we ’ll prosper in our love,’
Was scarce my business: let them order it;
Who else should care? I threw myself aside,
As one who had done her work and shuts her eyes
To rest the better.
I, who should have known,
Forereckoned mischief! Where we disavow
Being keeper to our brother, we ’re his Cain.

I might have held that poor child to my heart
A little longer! ’t would have hurt me much
To have hastened by its beats the marriage day,
And kept her safe meantime from tampering hands
Or, peradventure, traps. What drew me back
From telling Romney plainly the designs
Of Lady Waldemar, as spoken out
To me . . . me? Had I any right, ay, right,
With womanly compassion and reserve,
To break the fall of woman’s impudence? —
To stand by calmly, knowing what I knew,
And hear him call her *good?*
Distrust that word.
‘There is none good save God,’ said Jesus Christ.
If He once, in the first creation-week,
Called creatures good, — for ever, afterward,
The Devil only has done it, and his heirs,
The knaves who win so, and the fools who lose;
The word ’s grown dangerous. In the middle age,
I think they called malignant fays and imps
Good people. A good neighbor, even in this,
Is fatal sometimes, — cuts your morning up
To mincemeat of the very smallest talk,
Then helps to sugar her bohea at night
With your reputation. I have known good wives,
As chaste, or nearly so, as Potiphar’s;
And good, good mothers, who would use a child
To better an intrigue; good friends, beside
(Very good), who hung succinctly round your neck
And sucked your breath, as cats are fabled to do
By sleeping infants. And we all have known
Good critics who have stamped out poet’s hope,
Good statesmen who pulled ruin on the state,
Good patriots who for a theory risked a cause,
Good kings who disembowelled for a tax,
Good popes who brought all good to jeopardy,
Good Christians who sat still in easy chairs
And damned the general world for standing up. —
Now may the good God pardon all good men!

How bitterly I speak, — how certainly
The innocent white milk in us is turned,
By much persistent shining of the sun! —
Shake up the sweetest in us long enough,
With men, it drops to foolish curd, too sour
To feed the most untender of Christ’s lambs.

I should have thought, — a woman of the world
Like her I ’m meaning, centre to herself,
Who has wheeled on her own pivot half a life
In isolated self-love and self-will,
As a windmill seen at distance radiating
Its delicate white vans against the sky,
So soft and soundless, simply beautiful,
Seen nearer, — what a roar and tear it makes,
How it grinds and bruises! — if she loves at last,
Her love ’s a readjustment of self-love,
No more, — a need felt of another’s use
To her one advantage, as the mill wants grain,
The fire wants fuel, the very wolf wants prey,
And none of these is more unscrupulous

Than such a charming woman when she loves.
She 'll not be thwarted by an obstacle
So trifling as . . . her soul is, . . . much less yours ! —
Is God a consideration ? — she loves you,
Not God; she will not flinch for Him indeed:
She did not for the Marchioness of Perth,
When wanting tickets for the fancy ball.
She loves you, sir, with passion, to lunacy;
She loves you like her diamonds . . . almost.
Well,
A month passed so, and then the notice came,
On such a day the marriage at the church.
I was not backward.
Half Saint Giles in frieze
Was bidden to meet Saint James in cloth of gold,
And, after contract at the altar, pass
To eat a marriage-feast on Hampstead Heath.
Of course the people came in uncompelled,
Lame, blind, and worse — sick, sorrowful, and worse —
The humors of the peccant social wound
All pressed out, poured down upon Pimlico,
Exasperating the unaccustomed air
With a hideous interfusion. You 'd suppose
A finished generation, dead of plague,
Swept outward from their graves into the sun,
The moil of death upon them. What a sight !
A holiday of miserable men
Is sadder than a burial-day of kings.
They clogged the streets, they oozed into the church
In a dark slow stream, like blood. To see that sight,
The noble ladies stood up in their pews,
Some pale for fear, a few as red for hate,
Some simply curious, some just insolent,
And some in wondering scorn, — 'What next ? what next ? '
These crushed their delicate rose-lips from the smile
That misbecame them in a holy place,
With broidered hems of perfumed handkerchiefs;
Those passed the salts, with confidence of eyes
And simultaneous shiver of moiré silk:
While all the aisles, alive and black with heads,
Crawled slowly toward the altar from the street,
As bruised snakes crawl and hiss out of a hole
With shuddering involution, swaying slow
From right to left, and then from left to right,
In pants and pauses. What an ugly crest
Of faces rose upon you everywhere
From that crammed mass ! you did not usually
See faces like them in the open day:
They hide in cellars, not to make you mad
As Romney Leigh is. — Faces ! — O my God,
We call those, faces ? men's and women's . . . ay,
And children's; — babies, hanging like a rag
Forgotten on their mother's neck, — poor mouths,
Wiped clean of mother's milk by mother's blow
Before they are taught her cursing. Faces ? . . . phew,
We 'll call them vices, festering to despairs,
Or sorrows, petrifying to vices: not
A finger-touch of God left whole on them,
All ruined, lost — the countenance worn out
As the garment, the will dissolute as the act,
The passions loose and draggling in the dirt
To trip a foot up at the first free step !
Those, faces ? 't was as if you had stirred up hell
To heave its lowest dreg-fiends uppermost
In fiery swirls of slime, — such strangled fronts,
Such obdurate jaws were thrown up constantly
To twit you with your race, corrupt your blood,
And grind to devilish colors all your dreams
Henceforth, — though, haply, you should drop asleep

By clink of silver waters, in a muse
On Raffael's mild Madonna of the Bird.

I 've waked and slept through many nights and days
Since then, — but still that day will catch my breath
Like a nightmare. There are fatal days, indeed,
In which the fibrous years have taken root
So deeply, that they quiver to their tops
Whene'er you stir the dust of such a day.

My cousin met me with his eyes and hand,
And then, with just a word, . . . that 'Marian Erle
Was coming with her bridesmaids presently,'
Made haste to place me by the altar-stair
Where he and other noble gentlemen
And high-born ladies waited for the bride.

We waited. It was early: there was time
For greeting and the morning's compliment,
And gradually a ripple of women's talk
Arose and fell and tossed about a spray
Of English *s*'s, soft as a silent hush,
And, notwithstanding, quite as audible
As louder phrases thrown out by the men.
— 'Yes, really, if we need to wait in church,
We need to talk there.' — 'She ? 't is Lady Ayr,
In blue — not purple ! that 's the dowager.'
— 'She looks as young' — 'She flirts as young, you mean.
Why, if you had seen her upon Thursday night,
You 'd call Miss Norris modest.' — '*You* again !
I waltzed with you three hours back. Up at six,
Up still at ten; scarce time to change one's shoes:
I feel as white and sulky as a ghost,
So pray don't speak to me, Lord Belcher.' — 'No,
I 'll look at you instead, and it 's enough
While you have that face.' 'In church, my lord ! fie, fie !'
— 'Adair, you stayed for the Division ?' — 'Lost
By one.' 'The devil it is ! I 'm sorry for 't.
And if I had not promised Mistress Grove' . . .
'You might have kept your word to Liverpool.'
— 'Constituents must remember, after all,
We 're mortal.' — 'We remind them of it.' — 'Hark,
The bride comes ! here she comes, in a stream of milk !'
— 'There ? Dear, you are asleep still; don't you know
The five Miss Granvilles ? always dressed in white
To show they 're ready to be married.' — 'Lower !
The aunt is at your elbow.' — 'Lady Maud,
Did Lady Waldemar tell you she had seen
This girl of Leigh's ?' 'No, — wait ! 't was Mistress Brookes,
Who told me Lady Waldemar told her —
No, 't was n't Mistress Brookes.' — 'She 's pretty ?' — 'Who ?
Mistress Brookes ? Lady Waldemar ?' — 'How hot !
Pray is 't the law to-day we 're not to breathe ?
You 're treading on my shawl — I thank you, sir.'
— 'They say the bride 's a mere child, who can't read,
But knows the things she should n't, with wide-awake
Great eyes. I 'd go through fire to look at her.'
— 'You do, I think.' — 'And Lady Waldemar
(You see her; sitting close to Romney Leigh.
How beautiful she looks, a little flushed !)
Has taken up the girl, and methodized
Leigh's folly. Should I have come here, you suppose,
Except she 'd asked me ?' — 'She 'd have served him more
By marrying him herself.'
'Ah — there she comes,
The bride, at last !'
'Indeed, no. Past eleven.
She puts off her patched petticoat to-day
And puts on Mayfair manners, so begins
By setting us to wait.' — 'Yes, yes, this Leigh
Was always odd; it 's in the blood, I think;
His father's uncle's cousin's second son

Was, was . . . you understand me; and for him,
He 's stark, — has turned quite lunatic upon
This modern question of the poor — the poor.
An excellent subject when you 're moderate;
You 've seen Prince Albert's model lodging-house?
Does honor to his Royal Highness. Good!
But would he stop his carriage in Cheapside
To shake a common fellow by the fist
Whose name was . . . Shakespeare? No. We draw a line,
And if we stand not by our order, we
In England, we fall headlong. Here 's a sight, —
A hideous sight, a most indecent sight!
My wife would come, sir, or I had kept her back.
By heaven, sir, when poor Damiens' trunk and limbs
Were torn by horses, women of the court
Stood by and stared, exactly as to-day
On this dismembering of society,
With pretty, troubled faces.'
'Now, at last.
She comes now.'
'Where? who sees? you push me, sir,
Beyond the point of what is mannerly.
You 're standing, madam, on my second flounce.
I do beseech you . . . '
'No — it 's not the bride.
Half-past eleven. How late. The bridegroom, mark,
Gets anxious and goes out.'
'And as I said,
These Leighs! our best blood running in the rut!
It 's something awful. We had pardoned him
A simple misalliance got up aside
For a pair of sky-blue eyes; the House of Lords
Has winked at such things, and we 've all been young;
But here 's an intermarriage reasoned out,
A contract (carried boldly to the light
To challenge observation, pioneer
Good acts by a great example) 'twixt the extremes
Of martyrized society, — on the left
The well-born, on the right the merest mob,
To treat as equals! — 't is anarchical;
It means more than it says; 't is damnable.
Why, sir, we can't have even our coffee good,
Unless we strain it.'
'Here, Miss Leigh!'
'Lord Howe,
You 're Romney's friend. What 's all this waiting for?'

'I cannot tell. The bride has lost her head
(And way, perhaps!) to prove her sympathy
With the bridegroom.'
'What, — you also, disapprove!'

'Oh, *I* approve of nothing in the world,'
He answered, 'not of you, still less of me,
Nor even of Romney, though he 's worth us both.
We 're all gone wrong. The tune in us is lost;
And whistling down back alleys to the moon
Will never catch it.'
Let me draw Lord Howe.
A born aristocrat, bred radical,
And educated socialist, who still
Goes floating, on traditions of his kind,
Across the theoretic flood from France,
Though, like a drenched Noah on a rotten deck,
Scarce safer for his place there. He, at least,
Will never land on Ararat, he knows,
To recommence the world on the new plan:
Indeed, he thinks, said world had better end.
He sympathizes rather with the fish
Outside, than with the drowned paired beasts within
Who cannot couple again or multiply, —
And that 's the sort of Noah he is, Lord Howe.
He never could be anything complete,
Except a loyal, upright gentleman,
A liberal landlord, graceful diner-out,
And entertainer more than hospitable,
Whom authors dine with and forget the hock.
Whatever he believes, and it is much,
But nowise certain, now here and now there,
He still has sympathies beyond his creed
Diverting him from action. In the House,
No party counts upon him, while for all

His speeches have a noticeable weight.
Men like his books too (he has written books),
Which, safe to lie beside a bishop's chair,
At times outreach themselves with jets of fire
At which the foremost of the progressists
May warm audacious hands in passing by.
Of stature over-tall, lounging for ease;
Light hair, that seems to carry a wind in it,
And eyes that, when they look on you, will lean
Their whole weight, half in indolence and half
In wishing you unmitigated good,
Until you know not if to flinch from him
Or thank him. — 'T is Lord Howe.
                    'We 're all gone wrong,'
Said he; 'and Romney, that dear friend of ours,
Is nowise right. There 's one true thing on earth,
That 's love! he takes it up, and dresses it,
And acts a play with it, as Hamlet did,
To show what cruel uncles we have been,
And how we should be uneasy in our minds
While he, Prince Hamlet, weds a pretty maid
(Who keeps us too long waiting, we 'll confess)
By symbol, to instruct us formally
To fill the ditches up 'twixt class and class,
And live together in phalansteries.
What then? — he 's mad, our Hamlet! clap his play,
And bind him.'
                    'Ah, Lord Howe, this spectacle
Pulls stronger at us than the Dane's. See there!
The crammed aisles heave and strain and steam with life.
Dear Heaven, what life!'
                    'Why, yes, — a poet sees;
Which makes him different from a common man.
I, too, see somewhat, though I cannot sing;
I should have been a poet, only that
My mother took fright at the ugly world,
And bore me tongue-tied. If you 'll grant me now
That Romney gives us a fine actor-piece
To make us merry on his marriage-morn,
The fable 's worse than Hamlet's I 'll concede.
The terrible people, old and poor and blind,
Their eyes eat out with plague and poverty
From seeing beautiful and cheerful sights,
We 'll liken to a brutalized King Lear,
Led out, — by no means to clear scores with wrongs —
His wrongs are so far back, he has forgot
(All 's past like youth); but just to witness here
A simple contract, — he, upon his side,
And Regan with her sister Goneril
And all the dappled courtiers and court-fools
On their side. Not that any of these would say
They 're sorry, neither. What is done, is done,
And violence is now turned privilege,
As cream turns cheese, if buried long enough.
What could such lovely ladies have to do
With the old man there, in those ill-odorous rags,
Except to keep the wind-side of him? Lear
Is flat and quiet, as a decent grave;
He does not curse his daughters in the least:
Be these his daughters? Lear is thinking of
His porridge chiefly . . . is it getting cold
At Hampstead? will the ale be served in pots?
Poor Lear, poor daughters! Bravo, Romney's play!'

A murmur and a movement drew around,
A naked whisper touched us. Something wrong.
What 's wrong? The black crowd, as an overstrained
Cord, quivered in vibration, and I saw . . .
Was that *his* face I saw? . . . his . . . Romney Leigh's . . .
Which tossed a sudden horror like a sponge
Into all eyes, — while himself stood white upon
The topmost altar-stair and tried to speak,
And failed, and lifted higher above his head
A letter, . . . as a man who drowns and gasps.

'My brothers, bear with me! I am very weak.
I meant but only good. Perhaps I meant
Too proudly, and God snatched the circumstance
And changed it therefore. There 's no marriage — none.
She leaves me, — she departs, — she disappears, —
I lose her. Yet I never forced her "ay,"
To have her "no" so cast into my teeth
In manner of an accusation, thus.
My friends, you are dismissed. Go, eat and drink
According to the programme, — and farewell!'
He ended. There was silence in the church.
We heard a baby sucking in its sleep
At the farthest end of the aisle. Then spoke a man:
'Now, look to it, coves, that all the beef and drink
Be not filched from us like the other fun,
For beer 's spilt easier than a woman 's lost!
This gentry is not honest with the poor;
They bring us up, to trick us.' — 'Go it, Jim,'
A woman screamed back, — 'I 'm a tender soul,
I never banged a child at two years old
And drew blood from him, but I sobbed for it
Next moment, — and I 've had a plague of seven.
I 'm tender; I 've no stomach even for beef,
Until I know about the girl that 's lost,
That 's killed, mayhap. I did misdoubt, at first,
The fine lord meant no good by her or us.
He, maybe, got the upper hand of her
By holding up a wedding-ring, and then . . .
A choking finger on her throat last night,
And just a clever tale to keep us still,
As she is, poor lost innocent. "Disappear!"
Who ever disappears except a ghost?
And who believes a story of a ghost?
I ask you, — would a girl go off, instead
Of staying to be married? a fine tale!
A wicked man, I say, a wicked man!
For my part, I would rather starve on gin
Than make my dinner on his beef and beer.' —
At which a cry rose up — 'We 'll have our rights.
We 'll have the girl, the girl! Your ladies there
Are married safely and smoothly every day,
And *she* shall not drop through into a trap
Because she 's poor and of the people: shame!
We 'll have no tricks played off by gentlefolk;
We 'll see her righted.'
Through the rage and roar
I heard the broken words which Romney flung
Among the turbulent masses, from the ground
He held still with his masterful pale face, —
As huntsmen throw the ration to the pack,
Who, falling on it headlong, dog on dog
In heaps of fury, rend it, swallow it up
With yelling hound-jaws, — his indignant words,
His suppliant words, his most pathetic words,
Whereof I caught the meaning here and there
By his gesture . . . torn in morsels, yelled across,
And so devoured. From end to end, the church
Rocked round us like the sea in storm, and then
Broke up like the earth in earthquake. Men cried out
'Police' — and women stood and shrieked for God,
Or dropped and swooned; or, like a herd of deer
(For whom the black woods suddenly grow alive,
Unleashing their wild shadows down the wind
To hunt the creatures into corners, back
And forward), madly fled, or blindly fell,
Trod screeching underneath the feet of those
Who fled and screeched.
The last sight left to me
Was Romney's terrible calm face above
The tumult! — the last sound was 'Pull him down!

Strike — kill him!’ Stretching my unreasoning arms,
As men in dreams, who vainly interpose
’Twixt gods and their undoing, with a cry
I struggled to precipitate myself
Head-foremost to the rescue of my soul
In that white face, . . . till some one caught me back,
And so the world went out, — I felt no more.

What followed was told after by Lord Howe,
Who bore me senseless from the strangling crowd
In church and street, and then returned alone
To see the tumult quelled. The men of law
Had fallen as thunder on a roaring fire,
And made all silent, — while the people’s smoke
Passed eddying slowly from the emptied aisles.

Here ’s Marian’s letter, which a ragged child
Brought running, just as Romney at the porch
Looked out expectant of the bride. He sent
The letter to me by his friend Lord Howe
Some two hours after, folded in a sheet
On which his well-known hand had left a word.
Here ’s Marian’s letter.
‘Noble friend, dear saint,
Be patient with me. Never think me vile
Who might to-morrow morning be your wife
But that I loved you more than such a name.
Farewell, my Romney. Let me write it once, —
My Romney.
‘’T is so pretty a coupled word,
I have no heart to pluck it with a blot.
We say “my God” sometimes, upon our knees,
Who is not therefore vexed: so bear with it . . .
And me. I know I ’m foolish, weak, and vain:
Yet most of all I ’m angry with myself
For losing your last footstep on the stair
That last time of your coming, — yesterday!
The very first time I lost step of yours
(Its sweetness comes the next to what you speak),
But yesterday sobs took me by the throat
And cut me off from music.
‘Mister Leigh,
You ’ll set me down as wrong in many things.
You ’ve praised me, sir, for truth, — and now you ’ll learn
I had not courage to be rightly true.
I once began to tell you how she came,
The woman . . . and you stared upon the floor
In one of your fixed thoughts . . . which put me out
For that day. After, some one spoke of me,
So wisely, and of you, so tenderly,
Persuading me to silence for your sake . . .
Well, well! it seems this moment I was wrong
In keeping back from telling you the truth:
There might be truth betwixt us two, at least,
If nothing else. And yet ’t was dangerous.
Suppose a real angel came from heaven
To live with men and women! he ’d go mad,
If no considerate hand should tie a blind
Across his piercing eyes. ’T is thus with you:
You see us too much in your heavenly light;
I always thought so, angel, — and indeed
There ’s danger that you beat yourself to death
Against the edges of this alien world,
In some divine and fluttering pity.
‘Yes,
It would be dreadful for a friend of yours,
To see all England thrust you out of doors
And mock you from the windows. You might say,
Or think (that ’s worse) “There ’s some one in the house
I miss and love still.” Dreadful!
‘Very kind,
I pray you mark, was Lady Waldemar.

She came to see me nine times, rather ten —
So beautiful, she hurts one like the day
Let suddenly on sick eyes.
'Most kind of all,
Your cousin! — ah, most like you! Ere you came
She kissed me mouth to mouth: I felt her soul
Dip through her serious lips in holy fire.
God help me, but it made me arrogant;
I almost told her that you would not lose
By taking me to wife: though ever since
I 've pondered much a certain thing she asked . . .
"He loves you, Marian?" . . . in a sort of mild
Derisive sadness . . . as a mother asks
Her babe, "You 'll touch that star, you think?"
'Farewell!
I know I never touched it.
'This is worst:
Babes grow and lose the hope of things above;
A silver threepence sets them leaping high —
But no more stars! mark that.
'I 've writ all night
Yet told you nothing. God, if I could die,
And let this letter break off innocent
Just here! But no — for your sake.
'Here 's the last:
I never could be happy as your wife,
I never could be harmless as your friend,
I never will look more into your face
Till God says "Look!" I charge you, seek me not,
Nor vex yourself with lamentable thoughts
That peradventure I have come to grief;
Be sure I 'm well, I 'm merry, I 'm at ease,
But such a long way, long way, long way off,
I think you 'll find me sooner in my grave,
And that 's my choice, observe. For what remains,
An over-generous friend will care for me
And keep me happy . . . happier . . .
'There 's a blot!
This ink runs thick . . . we light girls lightly weep . . .
And keep me happier . . . was the thing to say,
Than as your wife I could be. — O, my star,
My saint, my soul! for surely you 're my soul,
Through whom God touched me! I am not so lost
I cannot thank you for the good you did,
The tears you stopped, which fell down bitterly,
Like these — the times you made me weep for joy
At hoping I should learn to write your notes
And save the tiring of your eyes, at night;
And most for that sweet thrice you kissed my lips
Saying "Dear Marian."
''T would be hard to read,
This letter, for a reader half as learn'd;
But you 'll be sure to master it in spite
Of ups and downs. My hand shakes, I am blind;
I 'm poor at writing at the best, — and yet
I tried to make my *g*'s the way you showed.
Farewell. Christ love you. — Say "poor Marian" now.'

Poor Marian! — wanton Marian! — was it so,
Or so? For days, her touching, foolish lines
We mused on with conjectural fantasy,
As if some riddle of a summer-cloud
On which one tries unlike similitudes
Of now a spotted Hydra-skin cast off,
And now a screen of carven ivory
That shuts the heavens' conventual secrets up
From mortals overbold. We sought the sense:
She loved him so perhaps (such words mean love),
That, worked on by some shrewd perfidious tongue
(And then I thought of Lady Waldemar),
She left him, not to hurt him; or perhaps
She loved one in her class, — or did not love,
But mused upon her wild bad tramping life
Until the free blood fluttered at her heart,
And black bread eaten by the roadside hedge

Seemed sweeter than being put to Romney's school
Of philanthropical self-sacrifice
Irrevocably. — Girls are girls, beside,
Thought I, and like a wedding by one rule.
You seldom catch these birds except with chaff:
They feel it almost an immoral thing
To go out and be married in broad day,
Unless some winning special flattery should
Excuse them to themselves for 't, . . . 'No one parts
Her hair with such a silver line as you,
One moonbeam from the forehead to the crown!'
Or else . . . 'You bite your lip in such a way
It spoils me for the smiling of the rest,'
And so on. Then a worthless gaud or two
To keep for love, — a ribbon for the neck,
Or some glass pin, — they have their weight with girls.
And Romney sought her many days and weeks:
He sifted all the refuse of the town,
Explored the trains, inquired among the ships,
And felt the country through from end to end;
No Marian! — Though I hinted what I knew, —
A friend of his had reasons of her own
For throwing back the match — he would not hear:
The lady had been ailing ever since,
The shock had harmed her. Something in his tone
Repressed me; something in me shamed my doubt
To a sigh repressed too. He went on to say
That, putting questions where his Marian lodged,
He found she had received for visitors,
Besides himself and Lady Waldemar
And, that once, me — a dubious woman dressed
Beyond us both: the rings upon her hands
Had dazed the children when she threw them pence;
'She wore her bonnet as the queen might hers,
To show the crown,' they said, — 'a scarlet crown
Of roses that had never been in bud.'

When Romney told me that, — for now and then
He came to tell me how the search advanced,
His voice dropped: I bent forward for the rest:
The woman had been with her, it appeared,
At first from week to week, then day by day,
And last, 't was sure . . .
I looked upon the ground
To escape the anguish of his eyes, and asked
As low as when you speak to mourners new
Of those they cannot bear yet to call dead,
'If Marian had as much as named to him
A certain Rose, an early friend of hers,
A ruined creature.'
'Never.' — Starting up
He strode from side to side about the room,
Most like some prisoned lion sprung awake,
Who has felt the desert sting him through his dreams.
'What was I to her, that she should tell me aught?
A friend! was *I* a friend? I see all clear.
Such devils would pull angels out of heaven,
Provided they could reach them; 't is their pride;
And that 's the odds 'twixt soul and body plague!
The veriest slave who drops in Cairo's street
Cries "Stand off from me" to the passengers;
While these blotched souls are eager to infect,
And blow their bad breath in a sister's face
As if they got some ease by it.'
I broke through.
'Some natures catch no plagues. I 've read of babes
Found whole and sleeping by the spotted breast
Of one a full day dead. I hold it true,

As I 'm a woman and know womanhood,
That Marian Erle, however lured from place,
Deceived in way, keeps pure in aim and heart
As snow that 's drifted from the garden-bank
To the open road.'
'T was hard to hear him laugh.
'The figure 's happy. Well — a dozen carts
And trampers will secure you presently
A fine white snow-drift. Leave it there, your snow:
'T will pass for soot ere sunset. Pure in aim?
She 's pure in aim, I grant you, — like myself,
Who thought to take the world upon my back
To carry it o'er a chasm of social ill,
And end by letting slip through impotence
A single soul, a child's weight in a soul,
Straight down the pit of hell! yes, I and she
Have reason to be proud of our pure aims.'
Then softly, as the last repenting drops
Of a thunder-shower, he added, 'The poor child,
Poor Marian! 't was a luckless day for her
When first she chanced on my philanthropy.'

He drew a chair beside me, and sat down;
And I, instinctively, as women use
Before a sweet friend's grief, — when, in his ear,
They hum the tune of comfort though themselves
Most ignorant of the special words of such,
And quiet so and fortify his brain
And give it time and strength for feeling out
To reach the availing sense beyond that sound, —
Went murmuring to him what, if written here,
Would seem not much, yet fetched him better help
Than peradventure if it had been more.

I 've known the pregnant thinkers of our time,
And stood by breathless, hanging on their lips,
When some chromatic sequence of fine thought
In learned modulation phrased itself
To an unconjectured harmony of truth:
And yet I 've been more moved, more raised, I say,
By a simple word . . . a broken easy thing
A three-years' infant might at need repeat,
A look, a sigh, a touch upon the palm,
Which meant less than 'I love you,' than by all
The full-voiced rhetoric of those master-mouths.

'Ah, dear Aurora,' he began at last,
His pale lips fumbling for a sort of smile,
'Your printer's devils have not spoilt your heart:
That 's well. And who knows but, long years ago
When you and I talked, you were somewhat right
In being so peevish with me? You, at least,
Have ruined no one through your dreams. Instead,
You 've helped the facile youth to live youth's day
With innocent distraction, still perhaps
Suggestive of things better than your rhymes.
The little shepherd-maiden, eight years old,
I 've seen upon the mountains of Vaucluse,
Asleep i' the sun, her head upon her knees,
The flocks all scattered, — is more laudable
Than any sheep-dog, trained imperfectly,
Who bites the kids through too much zeal.'
'I look
As if I had slept, then?'
He was touched at once
By something in my face. Indeed 't was sure
That he and I, — despite a year or two
Of younger life on my side, and on his
The heaping of the years' work on the days,
The three-hour speeches from the member's seat,
The hot committees in and out of doors,
The pamphlets, 'Arguments,' 'Collective Views,'
Tossed out as straw before sick houses, just

To show one 's sick and so be trod to dirt
And no more use, — through this world's underground,
The burrowing, groping effort, whence the arm
And heart come torn, — 't was sure that he and I
Were, after all, unequally fatigued;
That he, in his developed manhood, stood
A little sunburnt by the glare of life,
While I . . . it seemed no sun had shone on me,
So many seasons I had missed my Springs.
My cheeks had pined and perished from their orbs,
And all the youth-blood in them had grown white
As dew on autumn cyclamens: alone
My eyes and forehead answered for my face.

He said, 'Aurora, you are changed — are ill!'

'Not so, my cousin, — only not asleep,'
I answered, smiling gently. 'Let it be.
You scarcely found the poet of Vaucluse
As drowsy as the shepherds. What is art
But life upon the larger scale, the higher,
When, graduating up in a spiral line
Of still expanding and ascending gyres,
It pushes toward the intense significance
Of all things, hungry for the Infinite?
Art 's life, — and where we live, we suffer and toil.'

He seemed to sift me with his painful eyes.
'You take it gravely, cousin; you refuse
Your dreamland's right of common, and green rest.
You break the mythic turf where danced the nymphs,
With crooked ploughs of actual life, — let in
The axes to the legendary woods,
To pay the poll-tax. You are fallen indeed
On evil days, you poets, if yourselves
Can praise that art of yours no otherwise;
And, if you cannot, . . . better take a trade
And be of use: 't were cheaper for your youth.'

'Of use!' I softly echoed, 'there 's the point
We sweep about for ever in argument,
Like swallows which the exasperate, dying year
Sets spinning in black circles, round and round,
Preparing for far flights o'er unknown seas.
And we, where tend we?'
'Where?' he said, and sighed.
'The whole creation, from the hour we are born,
Perplexes us with questions. Not a stone
But cries behind us, every weary step,
"Where, where?" I leave stones to reply to stones.
Enough for me and for my fleshly heart
To hearken the invocations of my kind,
When men catch hold upon my shuddering nerves
And shriek "What help? what hope? what bread i' the house,
What fire i' the frost?" There must be some response,
Though mine fail utterly. This social Sphinx
Who sits between the sepulchres and stews,
Makes mock and mow against the crystal heavens,
And bullies God, — exacts a word at least
From each man standing on the side of God,
However paying a sphinx-price for it.
We pay it also if we hold our peace,
In pangs and pity. Let me speak and die.
Alas, you 'll say I speak and kill instead.'
I pressed in there. 'The best men, doing their best,
Know peradventure least of what they do:
Men usefullest i' the world are simply used;
The nail that holds the wood must pierce it first,
And He alone who wields the hammer sees
The work advanced by the earliest blow. Take heart.'

'Ah, if I could have taken yours!' he said,
'But that 's past now.' Then rising, — 'I will take
At least your kindness and encouragement.
I thank you. Dear, be happy. Sing your songs,
If that 's your way! but sometimes slumber too,

Nor tire too much with following, out of breath,
The rhymes upon your mountains of Delight.
Reflect, if Art be in truth the higher life,
You need the lower life to stand upon
In order to reach up unto that higher;
And none can stand a-tiptoe in the place
He cannot stand in with two stable feet.
Remember then! — for Art's sake, hold your life.'

We parted so. I held him in respect.
I comprehended what he was in heart
And sacrificial greatness. Ay, but he
Supposed me a thing too small, to deign to know:
He blew me, plainly, from the crucible
As some intruding, interrupting fly,
Not worth the pains of his analysis
Absorbed on nobler subjects. Hurt a fly!
He would not for the world: he 's pitiful
To flies even. 'Sing,' says he, 'and tease me still,
If that 's your way, poor insect.' That 's your way!

FIFTH BOOK

Aurora Leigh, be humble. Shall I hope
To speak my poems in mysterious tune
With man and nature? — with the lava-lymph
That trickles from successive galaxies
Still drop by drop adown the finger of God
In still new worlds? — with summer-days in this
That scarce dare breathe they are so beautiful?
With spring's delicious trouble in the ground,
Tormented by the quickened blood of roots,
And softly pricked by golden crocus-sheaves
In token of the harvest-time of flowers?
With winters and with autumns, — and beyond
With the human heart's large seasons, when it hopes
And fears, joys, grieves, and loves? — with all that strain
Of sexual passion, which devours the flesh
In a sacrament of souls? with mother's breasts
Which, round the new-made creatures hanging there,
Throb luminous and harmonious like pure spheres? —
With multitudinous life, and finally
With the great escapings of ecstatic souls,
Who, in a rush of too long prisoned flame,
Their radiant faces upward, burn away
This dark of the body, issuing on a world
Beyond our mortal? — can I speak my verse
So plainly in tune to these things and the rest
That men shall feel it catch them on the quick
As having the same warrant over them
To hold and move them if they will or no,
Alike imperious as the primal rhythm
Of that theurgic nature? — I must fail,
Who fail at the beginning to hold and move
One man, — and he my cousin, and he my friend,
And he born tender, made intelligent,
Inclined to ponder the precipitous sides
Of difficult questions; yet, obtuse to *me*,
Of *me*, incurious! likes me very well,
And wishes me a paradise of good,
Good looks, good means, and good digestion, — ay,
But otherwise evades me, puts me off
With kindness, with a tolerant gentleness, —
Too light a book for a grave man's reading! Go,
Aurora Leigh: be humble.
                                        There it is,
We women are too apt to look to one,
Which proves a certain impotence in art.
We strain our natures at doing something great,
Far less because it 's something great to do,
Than haply that we, so, commend ourselves
As being not small, and more appreciable
To some one friend. We must have mediators
Betwixt our highest conscience and the judge;
Some sweet saint's blood must quicken in our palms,
Or all the life in heaven seems slow and cold:
Good only being perceived as the end of good,
And God alone pleased, — that 's too poor, we think,
And not enough for us by any means.

Ay — Romney, I remember, told me once
We miss the abstract when we comprehend.
We miss it most when we aspire, — and fail.

Yet, so, I will not. — This vile woman's way
Of trailing garments shall not trip me up:
I 'll have no traffic with the personal thought
In Art's pure temple. Must I work in vain,
Without the approbation of a man?
It cannot be; it shall not. Fame itself,
That approbation of the general race,
Presents a poor end (though the arrow speed
Shot straight with vigorous finger to the white),
And the highest fame was never reached except
By what was aimed above it. Art for art,
And good for God Himself, the essential Good!
We 'll keep our aims sublime, our eyes erect,
Although our woman-hands should shake and fail;
And if we fail . . . But must we? —
Shall I fail?
The Greeks said grandly in their tragic phrase,
'Let no one be called happy till his death.'
To which I add, — Let no one till his death
Be called unhappy. Measure not the work
Until the day 's out and the labor done,
Then bring your gauges. If the day's work 's scant,
Why, call it scant; affect no compromise;
And, in that we have nobly striven at least,
Deal with us nobly, women though we be,
And honor us with truth if not with praise.

My ballads prospered; but the ballad's race
Is rapid for a poet who bears weights
Of thought and golden image. He can stand
Like Atlas, in the sonnet, — and support
His own heavens pregnant with dynastic stars;
But then he must stand still, nor take a step.
In that descriptive poem called 'The Hills,'
The prospects were too far and indistinct.
'T is true my critics said 'A fine view, that!'
The public scarcely cared to climb my book
For even the finest, and the public 's right;
A tree 's mere firewood, unless humanized, —
Which well the Greeks knew when they stirred its bark
With close-pressed bosoms of subsiding nymphs,
And made the forest-rivers garrulous
With babble of gods. For us, we are called to mark
A still more intimate humanity
In this inferior nature, or ourselves
Must fall like dead leaves trodden underfoot
By veritable artists. Earth (shut up
By Adam, like a fakir in a box
Left too long buried) remained stiff and dry,
A mere dumb corpse, till Christ the Lord came down,
Unlocked the doors, forced open the blank eyes,
And used his kingly chrism to straighten out
The leathery tongue turned back into the throat;
Since when, she lives, remembers, palpitates
In every limb, aspires in every breath,
Embraces infinite relations. Now
We want no half-gods, Panomphæan Joves,
Fauns, Naiads, Tritons, Oreads and the rest,
To take possession of a senseless world
To unnatural vampire-uses. See the earth,
The body of our body, the green earth,
Indubitably human like this flesh
And these articulated veins through which
Our heart drives blood. There 's not a flower of spring
That dies ere June but vaunts itself allied
By issue and symbol, by significance
And correspondence, to that spirit-world
Outside the limits of our space and time,
Whereto we are bound. Let poets give it voice
With human meanings, — else they miss the thought,

And henceforth step down lower, stand confessed
Instructed poorly for interpreters,
Thrown out by an easy cowslip in the text.
Even so my pastoral failed: it was a book
Of surface-pictures — pretty, cold, and false
With literal transcript, — the worse done, I think,
For being not ill-done: let me set my mark
Against such doings, and do otherwise.
This strikes me. — If the public whom we know
Could catch me at such admissions, I should pass
For being right modest. Yet how proud we are,
In daring to look down upon ourselves!

The critics say that epics have died out
With Agamemnon and the goat-nursed gods;
I 'll not believe it. I could never deem,
As Payne Knight did (the mythic mountaineer
Who travelled higher than he was born to live,
And showed sometimes the goitre in his throat
Discoursing of an image seen through fog),
That Homer's heroes measured twelve feet high.
They were but men: — his Helen's hair turned gray
Like any plain Miss Smith's who wears a front;
And Hector's infant whimpered at a plume
As yours last Friday at a turkey-cock.
All actual heroes are essential men,
And all men possible heroes: every age,
Heroic in proportions, double-faced,
Looks backward and before, expects a morn
And claims an epos.
Ay, but every age
Appears to souls who live in 't (ask Carlyle)
Most unheroic. Ours, for instance, ours:
The thinkers scout it, and the poets abound
Who scorn to touch it with a finger-tip:
A pewter age, — mixed metal, silver-washed;
An age of scum, spooned off the richer past,
An age of patches for old gaberdines,
An age of mere transition, meaning nought
Except that what succeeds must shame it quite
If God please. That 's wrong thinking, to my mind,
And wrong thoughts make poor poems.
Every age,
Through being beheld too close, is ill-discerned
By those who have not lived past it. We 'll suppose
Mount Athos carved, as Alexander schemed,
To some colossal statue of a man.
The peasants, gathering brushwood in his ear,
Had guessed as little as the browsing goats
Of form or feature of humanity
Up there, — in fact, had travelled five miles off
Or ere the giant image broke on them,
Full human profile, nose and chin distinct,
Mouth, muttering rhythms of silence up the sky
And fed at evening with the blood of suns;
Grand torso, — hand, that flung perpetually
The largesse of a silver river down
To all the country pastures. 'T is even thus
With times we live in, — evermore too great
To be apprehended near.
But poets should
Exert a double vision; should have eyes
To see near things as comprehensively
As if afar they took their point of sight,
And distant things as intimately deep
As if they touched them. Let us strive for this.
I do distrust the poet who discerns
No character or glory in his times,
And trundles back his soul five hundred years,
Past moat and drawbridge, into a castle-court,
To sing — oh, not of lizard or of toad
Alive i' the ditch there, — 't were excusable,
But of some black chief, half knight, half sheep-lifter,
Some beauteous dame, half chattel and half queen,
As dead as must be, for the greater part,

The poems made on their chivalric bones;
And that 's no wonder: death inherits death.

Nay, if there 's room for poets in this world
A little overgrown (I think there is),
Their sole work is to represent the age,
Their age, not Charlemagne's, — this live, throbbing age,
That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires,
And spends more passion, more heroic heat,
Betwixt the mirrors of its drawing-rooms,
Than Roland with his knights at Roncesvalles.
To flinch from modern varnish, coat or flounce,
Cry out for togas and the picturesque,
Is fatal, — foolish too. King Arthur's self
Was commonplace to Lady Guenever;
And Camelot to minstrels seemed as flat
As Fleet Street to our poets.
Never flinch,
But still, unscrupulously epic, catch
Upon the burning lava of a song
The full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age:
That, when the next shall come, the men of that
May touch the impress with reverent hand, and say
'Behold, — behold the paps we all have sucked!
This bosom seems to beat still, or at least
It sets ours beating: this is living art,
Which thus presents and thus records true life.'

What form is best for poems? Let me think
Of forms less, and the external. Trust the spirit,
As sovran nature does, to make the form;
For otherwise we only imprison spirit
And not embody. Inward evermore
To outward, — so in life, and so in art
Which still is life.
Five acts to make a play.
And why not fifteen? why not ten? or seven?
What matter for the number of the leaves,
Supposing the tree lives and grows? exact
The literal unities of time and place,
When 't is the essence of passion to ignore
Both time and place? Absurd. Keep up the fire,
And leave the generous flames to shape themselves.

'T is true the stage requires obsequiousness
To this or that convention; 'exit' here
And 'enter' there; the points for clapping, fixed,
Like Jacob's white-peeled rods before the rams,
And all the close-curled imagery clipped
In manner of their fleece at shearing-time.
Forget to prick the galleries to the heart
Precisely at the fourth act, — culminate
Our five pyramidal acts with one act more, —
We 're lost so: Shakespeare's ghost could scarcely plead
Against our just damnation. Stand aside;
We 'll muse for comfort that, last century,
On this same tragic stage on which we have failed,
A wigless Hamlet would have failed the same.

And whosoever writes good poetry,
Looks just to art. He does not write for you
Or me, — for London or for Edinburgh;
He will not suffer the best critic known
To step into his sunshine of free thought
And self-absorbed conception and exact
An inch-long swerving of the holy lines.
If virtue done for popularity
Defiles like vice, can art, for praise or hire,
Still keep its splendor and remain pure art?
Eschew such serfdom. What the poet writes,
He writes: mankind accepts it if it suits,
And that 's success: if not, the poem 's passed
From hand to hand, and yet from hand to hand
Until the unborn snatch it, crying out
In pity on their fathers' being so dull,
And that 's success too.
I will write no plays;
Because the drama, less sublime in this,

Makes lower appeals, submits more menially,
Adopts the standard of the public taste
To chalk its height on, wears a dog-chain round
Its regal neck, and learns to carry and fetch
The fashions of the day to please the day,
Fawns close on pit and boxes, who clap hands
Commending chiefly its docility
And humor in stage-tricks, — or else indeed
Gets hissed at, howled at, stamped at like a dog,
Or worse, we 'll say. For dogs, unjustly kicked,
Yell, bite at need; but if your dramatist
(Being wronged by some five hundred nobodies
Because their grosser brains most naturally
Misjudge the fineness of his subtle wit)
Shows teeth an almond's breadth, protests the length
Of a modest phrase, — 'My gentle countrymen,
There 's something in it haply of your fault,' —
Why then, besides five hundred nobodies,
He 'll have five thousand and five thousand more
Against him, — the whole public, — all the hoofs
Of King Saul's father's asses, in full drove,
And obviously deserve it. He appealed
To these, — and why say more if they condemn,
Than if they praise him? — Weep, my Æschylus,
But low and far, upon Sicilian shores!
For since 't was Athens (so I read the myth)
Who gave commission to that fatal weight
The tortoise, cold and hard, to drop on thee
And crush thee, — better cover thy bald head;
She 'll hear the softest hum of Hyblan bee
Before thy loudest protestation!
                                        Then
The risk 's still worse upon the modern stage.
I could not, for so little, accept success,
Nor would I risk so much, in ease and calm,
For manifester gains: let those who prize,
Pursue them: I stand off. And yet, forbid
That any irreverent fancy or conceit
Should litter in the Drama's throne-room where
The rulers of our art, in whose full veins
Dynastic glories mingle, sit in strength
And do their kingly work, — conceive, command,
And, from the imagination's crucial heat,
Catch up their men and women all a-flame
For action, all alive and forced to prove
Their life by living out heart, brain, and nerve,
Until mankind makes witness, 'These be men
As we are,' and vouchsafes the greeting due
To Imogen and Juliet — sweetest kin
On art's side.
                    'T is that, honoring to its worth
The drama, I would fear to keep it down
To the level of the footlights. Dies no more
The sacrificial goat, for Bacchus slain,
His filmed eyes fluttered by the whirling white
Of choral vestures, — troubled in his blood,
While tragic voices that clanged keen as swords,
Leapt high together with the altar-flame
And made the blue air wink. The waxen mask,
Which set the grand still front of Themis' son
Upon the puckered visage of a player, —
The buskin, which he rose upon and moved,
As some tall ship first conscious of the wind
Sweeps slowly past the piers, — the mouthpiece, where
The mere man's voice with all its breaths and breaks
Went sheathed in brass, and clashed on even heights
Its phrasèd thunders, — these things are no more,
Which once were. And concluding, which is clear,
The growing drama has outgrown such toys
Of simulated stature, face, and speech,
It also peradventure may outgrow
The simulation of the painted scene,
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume,
And take for a worthier stage the soul itself,

Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,
With all its grand orchestral silences
To keep the pauses of its rhythmic sounds.

Alas, I still see something to be done,
And what I do falls short of what I see,
Though I waste myself on doing. Long green days,
Worn bare of grass and sunshine, — long calm nights
From which the silken sleeps were fretted out,
Be witness for me, with no amateur's
Irreverent haste and busy idleness
I set myself to art! What then? what 's done?
What 's done, at last?
Behold, at last, a book.
If life-blood 's necessary, which it is, —
(By that blue vein athrob on Mahomet's brow,
Each prophet-poet's book must show man's blood!)
If life-blood 's fertilizing, I wrung mine
On every leaf of this, — unless the drops
Slid heavily on one side and left it dry.
That chances often: many a fervid man
Writes books as cold and flat as graveyard stones
From which the lichen 's scraped; and if Saint Preux
Had written his own letters, as he might,
We had never wept to think of the little mole
'Neath Julie's drooping eyelid. Passion is
But something suffered, after all.
While Art
Sets action on the top of suffering:
The artist's part is both to be and do,
Transfixing with a special, central power
The flat experience of the common man,
And turning outward, with a sudden wrench,
Half agony, half ecstasy, the thing
He feels the inmost, — never felt the less
Because he sings it. Does a torch less burn
For burning next reflectors of blue steel,
That *he* should be the colder for his place
'Twixt two incessant fires, — his personal life's
And that intense refraction which burns back
Perpetually against him from the round
Of crystal conscience he was born into
If artist-born? O sorrowful great gift
Conferred on poets, of a twofold life,
When one life has been found enough for pain!
We, staggering 'neath our burden as mere men,
Being called to stand up straight as demi-gods,
Support the intolerable strain and stress
Of the universal, and send clearly up,
With voices broken by the human sob,
Our poems to find rhymes among the stars!
But soft, — a 'poet' is a word soon said,
A book 's a thing soon written. Nay, indeed,
The more the poet shall be questionable,
The more unquestionably comes his book.
And this of mine — well, granting to myself
Some passion in it, — furrowing up the flats,
Mere passion will not prove a volume worth
Its gall and rags even. Bubbles round a keel
Mean nought, excepting that the vessel moves.
There 's more than passion goes to make a man
Or book, which is a man too.
I am sad.
I wonder if Pygmalion had these doubts
And feeling the hard marble first relent,
Grow supple to the straining of his arms,
And tingle through its cold to his burning lip,
Supposed his senses mocked, supposed the toil
Of stretching past the known and seen to reach
The archetypal Beauty out of sight,
Had made his heart beat fast enough for two,
And with his own life dazed and blinded him!
Not so; Pygmalion loved, — and whoso loves
Believes the impossible.
But I am sad:
I cannot thoroughly love a work of mine,
Since none seems worthy of my thought and hope
More highly mated. He has shot them down,

My Phœbus Apollo, soul within my soul,
Who judges, by the attempted, what 's attained,
And with the silver arrow from his height
Has struck down all my works before my face
While I said nothing. Is there aught to say?
I called the artist but a greatened man.
He may be childless also, like a man.

I labored on alone. The wind and dust
And sun of the world beat blistering in my face;
And hope, now for me, now against me, dragged
My spirits onward, as some fallen balloon,
Which, whether caught by blossoming tree or bare,
Is torn alike. I sometimes touched my aim,
Or seemed, — and generous souls cried out 'Be strong,
Take courage; now you 're on our level, — now!
The next step saves you!' I was flushed with praise,
But, pausing just a moment to draw breath,
I could not choose but murmur to myself
'Is this all? all that 's done? and all that 's gained?
If this then be success, 't is dismaller
Than any failure.'
                O my God, my God,
O supreme Artist, who as sole return
For all the cosmic wonder of thy work,
Demandest of us just a word . . . a name,
'My Father!' thou hast knowledge, only thou,
How dreary 't is for women to sit still,
On winter nights by solitary fires,
And hear the nations praising them far off,
Too far! ay, praising our quick sense of love,
Our very heart of passionate womanhood,
Which could not beat so in the verse without
Being present also in the unkissed lips
And eyes undried because there 's none to ask
The reason they grew moist.
                To sit alone
And think for comfort how, that very night,
Affianced lovers, leaning face to face
With sweet half-listenings for each other's breath,
Are reading haply from a page of ours,
To pause with a thrill (as if their cheeks had touched)
When such a stanza, level to their mood,
Seems floating their own thought out — 'So I feel
For thee,' — 'And I, for thee: this poet knows
What everlasting love is!' — how, that night,
Some father, issuing from the misty roads
Upon the luminous round of lamp and hearth
And happy children, having caught up first
The youngest there until it shrink and shriek
To feel the cold chin prick its dimples through
With winter from the hills, may throw i' the lap
Of the eldest (who has learnt to drop her lids
To hide some sweetness newer than last year's)
Our book and cry, . . . 'Ah you, you care for rhymes;
So here be rhymes to pore on under trees,
When April comes to let you! I 've been told
They are not idle as so many are,
But set hearts beating pure as well as fast.
'T is yours, the book; I 'll write your name in it,
That so you may not lose, however lost
In poet's lore and charming reverie,
The thought of how your father thought of *you*
In riding from the town.'
                To have our books
Appraised by love, associated with love,
While *we* sit loveless! is it hard, you think?
At least 't is mournful. Fame, indeed, 't was said,
Means simply love. It was a man said that:
And then, there 's love and love: the love of all
(To risk in turn a woman's paradox)
Is but a small thing to the love of one.
You bid a hungry child be satisfied
With a heritage of many corn-fields: nay,

He says he 's hungry, — he would rather have
That little barley-cake you keep from him
While reckoning up his harvests. So with us
(Here, Romney, too, we fail to generalize):
We 're hungry.
Hungry! but it 's pitiful
To wail like unweaned babes and suck our thumbs
Because we 're hungry. Who, in all this world
(Wherein we are haply set to pray and fast
And learn what good is by its opposite),
Has never hungered? Woe to him who has found
The meal enough! if Ugolino 's full,
His teeth have crunched some foul unnatural thing,
For here satiety proves penury
More utterly irremediable. And since
We needs must hunger, — better, for man's love,
Than God's truth! better, for companions sweet,
Than great convictions! let us bear our weights,
Preferring dreary hearths to desert souls.
Well, well! they say we 're envious, we who rhyme;
But I, because I am a woman perhaps
And so rhyme ill, am ill at envying.
I never envied Graham his breadth of style,
Which gives you, with a random smutch or two
(Near-sighted critics analyze to smutch),
Such delicate perspectives of full life:
Nor Belmore, for the unity of aim
To which he cuts his cedarn poems, fine
As sketchers do their pencils: nor Mark Gage,
For that caressing color and trancing tone
Whereby you 're swept away and melted in
The sensual element, which with a back wave
Restores you to the level of pure souls
And leaves you with Plotinus. None of these,
For native gifts or popular applause,
I 've envied; but for this, — that when by chance
Says some one, — 'There goes Belmore, a great man!
He leaves clean work behind him, and requires
No sweeper up of the chips,' . . . a girl I know,
Who answers nothing, save with her brown eyes,
Smiles unaware as if a guardian saint
Smiled in her: — for this, too, — that Gage comes home
And lays his last book's prodigal review
Upon his mother's knee, where, years ago,
He laid his childish spelling-book and learned
To chirp and peck the letters from her mouth,
As young birds must. 'Well done,' she murmured then;
She will not say it now more wonderingly:
And yet the last 'Well done' will touch him more,
As catching up to-day and yesterday
In a perfect chord of love: and so, Mark Gage,
I envy you your mother! — and you, Graham,
Because you have a wife who loves you so,
She half forgets, at moments, to be proud
Of being Graham's wife, until a friend observes,
'The boy here has his father's massive brow
Done small in wax . . . if we push back the curls.'
Who loves me? Dearest father, — mother sweet, —
I speak the names out sometimes by myself,
And make the silence shiver. They sound strange,
As Hindostanee to an Ind-born man
Accustomed many years to English speech;
Or lovely poet-words grown obsolete,
Which will not leave off singing. Up in heaven
I have my father, — with my mother's face
Beside him in a blotch of heavenly light;
No more for earth's familiar, household use,
No more. The best verse written by this hand

Can never reach them where they sit, to seem
Well done to *them*. Death quite unfellows us,
Sets dreadful odds betwixt the live and dead,
And makes us part as those at Babel did
Through sudden ignorance of a common tongue.
A living Cæsar would not dare to play
At bowls with such as my dead father is.

And yet this may be less so than appears,
This change and separation. Sparrows five
For just two farthings, and God cares for each.
If God is not too great for little cares,
Is any creature, because gone to God?
I 've seen some men, veracious, nowise mad,
Who have thought or dreamed, declared and testified
They heard the Dead a-ticking like a clock
Which strikes the hours of the eternities,
Beside them, with their natural ears, — and known
That human spirits feel the human way
And hate the unreasoning awe which waves them off
From possible communion. It may be.
At least, earth separates as well as heaven.
For instance, I have not seen Romney Leigh
Full eighteen months . . . add six, you get two years.
They say he 's very busy with good works, —
Has parted Leigh Hall into almshouses.
He made one day an almshouse of his heart,
Which ever since is loose upon the latch
For those who pull the string. — I never did.

It always makes me sad to go abroad,
And now I 'm sadder that I went to-night
Among the lights and talkers at Lord Howe's.
His wife is gracious, with her glossy braids,
And even voice, and gorgeous eyeballs, calm
As her other jewels. If she 's somewhat cold,
Who wonders, when her blood has stood so long
In the ducal reservoir she calls her line
By no means arrogantly? she 's not proud;
Not prouder than the swan is of the lake
He has always swum in; — 't is her element;
And so she takes it with a natural grace,
Ignoring tadpoles. She just knows perhaps
There *are* who travel without outriders,
Which is n't her fault. Ah, to watch her face,
When good Lord Howe expounds his theories
Of social justice and equality!
'T is curious, what a tender, tolerant bend
Her neck takes: for she loves him, likes his talk,
'Such clever talk — that dear, odd Algernon!'
She listens on, exactly as if he talked
Some Scandinavian myth of Lemures,
Too pretty to dispute, and too absurd.
She 's gracious to me as her husband's friend,
And would be gracious were I not a Leigh,
Being used to smile just so, without her eyes,
On Joseph Strangways the Leeds mesmerist,
And Delia Dobbs the lecturer from 'the States'
Upon the 'Woman's question.' Then, for him,
I like him; he 's my friend. And all the rooms
Were full of crinkling silks that swept about
The fine dust of most subtle courtesies.
What then? — why then, we come home to be sad.

How lovely One I love not looked to-night!
She 's very pretty, Lady Waldemar.
Her maid must use both hands to twist that coil
Of tresses, then be careful lest the rich
Bronze rounds should slip: — she missed, though, a gray hair,
A single one, — I saw it; otherwise

The woman looked immortal. How they told,
Those alabaster shoulders and bare breasts,
On which the pearls, drowned out of sight in milk,
Were lost, excepting for the ruby-clasp!
They split the amaranth velvet-bodice down
To the waist or nearly, with the audacious press
Of full-breathed beauty. If the heart within
Were half as white! — but, if it were, perhaps
The breast were closer covered and the sight
Less aspectable by half, too.
                                        I heard
The young man with the German student's look —
A sharp face, like a knife in a cleft stick,
Which shot up straight against the parting line
So equally dividing the long hair, —
Say softly to his neighbor (thirty-five
And mediæval), 'Look that way, Sir Blaise.
She 's Lady Waldemar — to the left — in red —
Whom Romney Leigh, our ablest man just now,
Is soon about to marry.'
                                        Then replied
Sir Blaise Delorme, with quiet, priestlike voice,
Too used to syllable damnations round
To make a natural emphasis worth while:
'Is Leigh your ablest man? the same, I think,
Once jilted by a recreant pretty maid
Adopted from the people? Now, in change,
He seems to have plucked a flower from the other side
Of the social hedge.'
                    'A flower, a flower,' exclaimed
My German student, — his own eyes full-blown
Bent on her. He was twenty, certainly.

Sir Blaise resumed with gentle arrogance,
As if he had dropped his alms into a hat
And gained the right to counsel, — 'My young friend,
I doubt your ablest man's ability
To get the least good or help meet for him,
For pagan phalanstery or Christian home,
From such a flowery creature.'
                                        'Beautiful!'
My student murmured rapt, — 'Mark how she stirs!
Just waves her head, as if a flower indeed,
Touched far off by the vain breath of our talk.'

At which that bilious Grimwald (he who writes
For the Renovator), who had seemed absorbed
Upon the table-book of autographs
(I dare say mentally he crunched the bones
Of all those writers, wishing them alive
To feel his tooth in earnest), turned short round
With low carnivorous laugh, — 'A flower, of course!
She neither sews nor spins, — and takes no thought
Of her garments . . . falling off.'
                                        The student flinched;
Sir Blaise, the same; then both, drawing back their chairs
As if they spied black-beetles on the floor,
Pursued their talk, without a word being thrown
To the critic.
                    Good Sir Blaise's brow is high
And noticeably narrow: a strong wind
You fancy, might unroof him suddenly,
And blow that great top attic off his head
So piled with feudal relics. You admire
His nose in profile, though you miss his chin;
But, though you miss his chin, you seldom miss
His ebon cross worn innermostly (carved
For penance by a saintly Styrian monk
Whose flesh was too much with him), slipping through
Some unaware unbuttoned casualty
Of the under-waistcoat. With an absent air
Sir Blaise sat fingering it and speaking low,
While I, upon the sofa, heard it all.

'My dear young friend, if we could bear our eyes,
Like blessedest Saint Lucy, on a plate,

They would not trick us into choosing wives,
As doublets, by the color. Otherwise
Our fathers chose, — and therefore, when they had hung
Their household keys about a lady's waist,
The sense of duty gave her dignity;
She kept her bosom holy to her babes,
And, if a moralist reproved her dress,
'T was "Too much starch!" — and not "Too little lawn!"'

'Now, pshaw!' returned the other in a heat,
A little fretted by being called 'young friend,'
Or so I took it, — 'for Saint Lucy's sake,
If she 's the saint to swear by, let us leave
Our fathers, — plagued enough about our sons!'
(He stroked his beardless chin) 'yes, plagued, sir, plagued:
The future generations lie on us
As heavy as the nightmare of a seer;
Our meat and drink grow painful prophecy:
I ask you, — have we leisure, if we liked,
To hollow out our weary hands to keep
Your intermittent rushlight of the past
From draughts in lobbies? Prejudice of sex
And marriage-law . . . the socket drops them through
While we two speak, — however may protest
Some over-delicate nostrils like your own,
'Gainst odors thence arising.'
'You are young,'
Sir Blaise objected.
'If I am,' he said
With fire, — 'though somewhat less so than I seem,
The young run on before, and see the thing
That 's coming. Reverence for the young, I cry.
In that new church for which the world 's near ripe,
You 'll have the younger in the Elder's chair,
Presiding with his ivory front of hope
O'er foreheads clawed by cruel carrion-birds
Of life's experience.'
'Pray your blessing, sir,'
Sir Blaise replied good-humoredly, — 'I plucked
A silver hair this morning from my beard,
Which left me your inferior. Would I were
Eighteen and worthy to admonish you!
If young men of your order run before
To see such sights as sexual prejudice
And marriage-law dissolved, — in plainer words,
A general concubinage expressed
In a universal pruriency, — the thing
Is scarce worth running fast for, and you 'd gain
By loitering with your elders.'
'Ah,' he said,
'Who, getting to the top of Pisgah-hill,
Can talk with one at bottom of the view,
To make it comprehensible? Why, Leigh
Himself, although our ablest man, I said,
Is scarce advanced to see as far as this,
Which some are: he takes up imperfectly
The social question — by one handle — leaves
The rest to trail. A Christian socialist
Is Romney Leigh, you understand.'
'Not I.
I disbelieve in Christian-pagans, much
As you in women-fishes. If we mix
Two colors, we lose both, and make a third
Distinct from either. Mark you! to mistake
A color is the sign of a sick brain,
And mine, I thank the saints, is clear and cool:
A neutral tint is here impossible.
The church, — and by the church I mean, of course,
The catholic, apostolic, mother-church, —
Draws lines as plain and straight as her own walls,
Inside of which are Christians, obviously,
And outside . . . dogs.'
'We thank you. Well I know
The ancient mother-church would fain still bite,
For all her toothless gums, — as Leigh himself
Would fain be a Christian still, for all his wit.
Pass that; you two may settle it, for me.
You 're slow in England. In a month I learnt
At Göttingen enough philosophy
To stock your English schools for fifty years;
Pass that, too. Here alone, I stop you short,

— Supposing a true man like Leigh could stand
Unequal in the stature of his life
To the height of his opinions. Choose a wife
Because of a smooth skin? — not he, not he!
He 'd rail at Venus' self for creaking shoes,
Unless she walked his way of righteousness:
And if he takes a Venus Meretrix
(No imputation on the lady there),
Be sure that, by some sleight of Christian art,
He has metamorphosed and converted her
To a Blessed Virgin.'
'Soft!' Sir Blaise drew breath
As if it hurt him, — 'Soft! no blasphemy,
I pray you!'
'The first Christians did the thing:
Why not the last?' asked he of Göttingen,
With just that shade of sneering on the lip
Compensates for the lagging of the beard, —
'And so the case is. If that fairest fair
Is talked of as the future wife of Leigh,
She 's talked of too, at least as certainly,
As Leigh's disciple. You may find her name
On all his missions and commissions, schools,
Asylums, hospitals, — he had her down,
With other ladies whom her starry lead
Persuaded from their spheres, to his country-place
In Shropshire, to the famed phalanstery
At Leigh Hall, christianized from Fourier's own
(In which he has planted out his sapling stocks
Of knowledge into social nurseries),
And there, they say, she has tarried half a week,
And milked the cows, and churned, and pressed the curd,
And said "my sister" to the lowest drab
Of all the assembled castaways; such girls!
Ay, sided with them at the washing-tub —
Conceive, Sir Blaise, those naked perfect arms,
Round glittering arms, plunged elbow-deep in suds,
Like wild swans hid in lilies all a-shake.'

Lord Howe came up. 'What, talking poetry
So near the image of the unfavoring Muse?
That 's you, Miss Leigh: I 've watched you half an hour
Precisely as I watched the statue called
A Pallas in the Vatican; — you mind
The face, Sir Blaise? — intensely calm and sad,
As wisdom cut it off from fellowship, —
But *that* spoke louder. Not a word from *you!*
And these two gentlemen were bold, I marked,
And unabashed by even your silence.'
'Ah,'
Said I, 'my dear Lord Howe, you shall not speak
To a printing woman who has lost her place
(The sweet safe corner of the household fire
Behind the heads of children), compliments,
As if she were a woman. We who have clipt
The curls before our eyes may see at least
As plain as men do. Speak out, man to man;
No compliments, beseech you.'
'Friend to friend,
Let that be. We are sad to-night, I saw
(— Good night, Sir Blaise! ah, Smith — he has slipped away),
I saw you across the room, and stayed, Miss Leigh,
To keep a crowd of lion-hunters off,
With faces toward your jungle. There were three;
A spacious lady, five feet ten and fat,
Who has the devil in her (and there 's room)
For walking to and fro upon the earth,
From Chippewa to China; she requires
Your autograph upon a tinted leaf
'Twixt Queen Pomare's and Emperor Soulouque's.
Pray give it; she has energies, though fat:
For me, I 'd rather see a rick on fire
Than such a woman angry. Then a youth
Fresh from the backwoods, green as the underboughs,
Asks modestly, Miss Leigh, to kiss your shoe,
And adds, he has an epic in twelve parts,
Which when you 've read, you 'll do it for his boot:
All which I saved you, and absorb next week

Both manuscript and man, — because a lord
Is still more potent than a poetess
With any extreme republican. Ah, ah,
You smile, at last, then.'
'Thank you.'
'Leave the smile.
I 'll lose the thanks for 't, — ay, and throw you in
My transatlantic girl, with golden eyes,
That draw you to her splendid whiteness as
The pistil of a water-lily draws,
Adust with gold. Those girls across the sea
Are tyrannously pretty, — and I swore
(She seemed to me an innocent, frank girl)
To bring her to you for a woman's kiss,
Not now, but on some other day or week:
— We 'll call it perjury; I give her up.'

'No, bring her.'
'Now,' said he, 'you make it hard
To touch such goodness with a grimy palm.
I thought to tease you well, and fret you cross,
And steel myself, when rightly vexed with you,
For telling you a thing to tease you more.'

'Of Romney?'
'No, no; nothing worse,' he cried,
'Of Romney Leigh than what is buzzed about, —
That *he* is taken in an eye-trap too,
Like many half as wise. The thing I mean
Refers to you, not him.'
'Refers to me.'
He echoed, — 'Me! You sound it like a stone
Dropped down a dry well very listlessly
By one who never thinks about the toad
Alive at the bottom. Presently perhaps
You 'll sound your "me" more proudly — till I shrink.'

'Lord Howe 's the toad, then, in this question?'
'Brief,
We 'll take it graver. Give me sofa-room,
And quiet hearing. You know Eglinton,
John Eglinton, of Eglinton in Kent?'

'Is *he* the toad? — he 's rather like the snail,
Known chiefly for the house upon his back:
Divide the man and house — you kill the man;
That 's Eglinton of Eglinton, Lord Howe.'

He answered grave. 'A reputable man,
An excellent landlord of the olden stamp,
If somewhat slack in new philanthropies,
Who keeps his birthdays with a tenants' dance,
Is hard upon them when they miss the church
Or hold their children back from catechism,
But not ungentle when the agèd poor
Pick sticks at hedge-sides: nay, I 've heard him say
"The old dame has a twinge because she stoops;
That 's punishment enough for felony."'

'O tender-hearted landlord! may I take
My long lease with him, when the time arrives
For gathering winter-fagots!'
'He likes art,
Buys books and pictures . . . of a certain kind;
Neglects no patent duty; a good son' . . .

'To a most obedient mother. Born to wear
His father's shoes, he wears her husband's too:
Indeed I 've heard it's touching. Dear Lord Howe,
You shall not praise *me* so against your heart,
When I 'm at worst for praise and fagots.'
'Be
Less bitter with me, for . . . in short,' he said,
'I have a letter, which he urged me so
To bring you . . . I could scarcely choose but yield;
Insisting that a new love, passing through
The hand of an old friendship, caught from it
Some reconciling odor.'
'Love, you say?
My lord, I cannot love: I only find

The rhyme for love, — and that 's not love, my lord.
Take back your letter.'
'Pause: you 'll read it first?'

'I will not read it: it is stereotyped;
The same he wrote to, — anybody's name,
Anne Blythe the actress, when she died so true,
A duchess fainted in a private box:
Pauline the dancer, after the great *pas*
In which her little feet winked overhead
Like other fire-flies, and amazed the pit:
Or Baldinacci, when her F in alt
Had touched the silver tops of heaven itself
With such a pungent spirit-dart, the Queen
Laid softly, each to each, her white-gloved palms,
And sighed for joy: or else (I thank your friend)
Aurora Leigh, — when some indifferent rhymes,
Like those the boys sang round the holy ox
On Memphis-highway, chance perhaps to set
Our Apis-public lowing. Oh, he wants,
Instead of any worthy wife at home,
A star upon his stage of Eglinton?
Advise him that he is not overshrewd
In being so little modest: a dropped star
Makes bitter waters, says a Book I 've read, —
And there 's his unread letter.'
'My dear friend,'
Lord Howe began . . .
In haste I tore the phrase.
You mean your friend of Eglinton, or me?'

I mean you, you,' he answered with some fire.
A happy life means prudent compromise;
The tare runs through the farmer's garnered sheaves,
And though the gleaner's apron holds pure wheat
We count her poorer. Tare with wheat, we cry,
And good with drawbacks. You, you love your art,
And, certain of vocation, set your soul
On utterance. Only, in this world we have made
(They say God made it first, but if He did
'T was so long since, and, since, we have spoiled it so,
He scarce would know it, if He looked this way,
From hells we preach of, with the flames blown out),
— In this bad, twisted, topsy-turvy world
Where all the heaviest wrongs get uppermost, —
In this uneven, unfostering England here,
Where ledger-strokes and sword-strokes count indeed,
But soul-strokes merely tell upon the flesh
They strike from, — it is hard to stand for art,
Unless some golden tripod from the sea
Be fished up, by Apollo's divine chance,
To throne such feet as yours, my prophetess,
At Delphi. Think, — the god comes down as fierce
As twenty bloodhounds, shakes you, strangles you,
Until the oracular shriek shall ooze in froth!
At best 't is not all ease, — at worst too hard:
A place to stand on is a 'vantage gained,
And here 's your tripod. To be plain, dear friend,
You 're poor, except in what you richly give;
You labor for your own bread painfully
Or ere you pour our wine. For art's sake, pause.'

I answered slow, — as some wayfaring man,
Who feels himself at night too far from home,
Makes steadfast face against the bitter wind.
'Is art so less a thing than virtue is,
That artists first must cater for their ease
Or ever they make issue past themselves
To generous use? Alas, and is it so
That we, who would be somewhat clean, must sweep
Our ways as well as walk them, and no friend
Confirm us nobly, — "Leave results to God,
But you, be clean?" What! "prudent compromise

Makes acceptable life," you say instead,
You, you, Lord Howe? — in things indifferent, well.
For instance, compromise the wheaten bread
For rye, the meat for lentils, silk for serge,
And sleep on down, if needs, for sleep on straw;
But there, end compromise. I will not bate
One artist-dream on straw or down, my lord,
Nor pinch my liberal soul, though I be poor,
Nor cease to love high, though I live thus low.'

So speaking, with less anger in my voice
Than sorrow, I rose quickly to depart;
While he, thrown back upon the noble shame
Of such high-stumbling natures, murmured words,
The right words after wrong ones. Ah, the man
Is worthy, but so given to entertain
Impossible plans of superhuman life, —
He sets his virtues on so raised a shelf,
To keep them at the grand millennial height,
He has to mount a stool to get at them;
And, meantime, lives on quite the common way,
With everybody's morals.
As we passed,
Lord Howe insisting that his friendly arm
Should oar me across the sparkling brawling stream
Which swept from room to room, — we fell at once
On Lady Waldemar. 'Miss Leigh,' she said,
And gave me such a smile, so cold and bright,
As if she tried it in a 'tiring glass
And liked it, 'all to-night I 've strained at you
As babes at baubles held up out of reach
By spiteful nurses ("Never snatch," they say),
And there you sat, most perfectly shut in
By good Sir Blaise and clever Mister Smith
And then our dear Lord Howe! at last indeed
I almost snatched. I have a world to speak
About your cousin's place in Shropshire, where
I 've been to see his work . . . our work, — you heard
I went? . . . and of a letter yesterday,
In which if I should read a page or two
You might feel interest, though you 're locked of course
In literary toil. — You 'll like to hear
Your last book lies at the phalanstery,
As judged innocuous for the elder girls
And younger women who still care for books.
We all must read, you see, before we live,
Till slowly the ineffable light comes up
And, as it deepens, drowns the written word, —
So said your cousin, while we stood and felt
A sunset from his favorite beech-tree seat,
He might have been a poet if he would,
But then he saw the higher thing at once
And climbed to it. I think he looks well now,
Has quite got over that unfortunate . . .
Ah, ah . . . I know it moved you. Tender-heart!
You took a liking to the wretched girl.
Perhaps you thought the marriage suitable,
Who knows? a poet hankers for romance,
And so on. As for Romney Leigh, 't is sure
He never loved her, — never. By the way,
You have not heard of *her?* . . . quite out of sight,
And out of saving? lost in every sense?'

She might have gone on talking half an hour
And I stood still, and cold, and pale, I think,
As a garden-statue a child pelts with snow
For pretty pastime. Every now and then
I put in 'yes' or 'no,' I scarce knew why;
The blind man walks wherever the dog pulls,
And so I answered. Till Lord Howe broke in:
'What penance takes the wretch who interrupts
The talk of charming women? I, at last,
Must brave it. Pardon, Lady Waldemar,

The lady on my arm is tired, unwell,
And loyally I 've promised she shall say
No harder word this evening than . . . good-night;
The rest her face speaks for her.' — Then we went.

And I breathe large at home. I drop my cloak,
Unclasp my girdle, loose the band that ties
My hair . . . now could I but unloose my soul !
We are sepulchred alive in this close world,
And want more room.
The charming woman there —
This reckoning up and writing down her talk
Affects me singularly. How she talked
To pain me ! woman's spite. — You wear steel-mail:
A woman takes a housewife from her breast
And plucks the delicatest needle out
As 't were a rose, and pricks you carefully
'Neath nails, 'neath eyelids, in your nostrils, — say,
A beast would roar so tortured, — but a man,
A human creature, must not, shall not flinch,
No, not for shame.
What vexes, after all,
Is just that such as she, with such as I,
Knows how to vex. Sweet heaven, she takes me up
As if she had fingered me and dog-eared me
And spelled me by the fireside half a life !
She knows my turns, my feeble points. — What then ?
The knowledge of a thing implies the thing;
Of course, she found *that* in me, she saw *that*,
Her pencil underscored *this* for a fault,
And I, still ignorant. Shut the book up, — close !
And crush that beetle in the leaves.
O heart,
At last we shall grow hard too, like the rest,
And call it self-defence because we are soft.

And after all, now . . . why should I be pained
That Romney Leigh, my cousin, should espouse
This Lady Waldemar ? And, say, she held
Her newly-blossomed gladness in my face, . . .
'T was natural surely, if not generous,
Considering how, when winter held her fast,
I helped the frost with mine, and pained her more
Than she pains me. Pains me ! — but wherefore pained ?
'T is clear my cousin Romney wants a wife, —
So, good ! — The man's need of the woman, here,
Is greater than the woman's of the man,
And easier served; for where the man discerns
A sex (ah, ah, the man can generalize,
Said he), we see but one, ideally
And really: where we yearn to lose ourselves
And melt like white pearls in another's wine,
He seeks to double himself by what he loves,
And make his drink more costly by our pearls.
At board, at bed, at work and holiday,
It is not good for man to be alone,
And that 's his way of thinking, first and last,
And thus my cousin Romney wants a wife.
But then my cousin sets his dignity
On personal virtue. If he understands
By love, like others, self-aggrandizement,
It is that he may verily be great
By doing rightly and kindly. Once he thought,
For charitable ends set duly forth
In Heaven's white judgment-book, to marry . . . ah,
We 'll call her name Aurora Leigh, although
She 's changed since then ! — and once, for social ends,
Poor Marian Erle, my sister Marian Erle,
My woodland sister, sweet maid Marian,
Whose memory moans on in me like the wind

Through ill-shut casements, making me more sad
Than ever I find reasons for. Alas,
Poor pretty plaintive face, embodied ghost!
He finds it easy then, to clap thee off
From pulling at his sleeve and book and pen, —
He locks thee out at night into the cold
Away from butting with thy horny eyes
Against his crystal dreams, that now he 's strong
To love anew? that Lady Waldemar
Succeeds my Marian?
After all, why not?
He loved not Marian, more than once he loved
Aurora. If he loves at last that Third,
Albeit she prove as slippery as spilt oil
On marble floors, I will not augur him
Ill-luck for that. Good love, howe'er ill-placed,
Is better for a man's soul in the end,
Than if he loved ill what deserves love well.
A pagan, kissing for a step of Pan
The wild-goat's hoof-print on the loamy down,
Exceeds our modern thinker who turns back
The strata . . . granite, limestone, coal, and clay,
Concluding coldly with 'Here 's law! where 's God?'

And then at worst, — if Romney loves her not, —
At worst — if he 's incapable of love,
Which may be — then indeed, for such a man
Incapable of love, she 's good enough;
For she, at worst too, is a woman still
And loves him . . . as the sort of woman can.

My loose long hair began to burn and creep,
Alive to the very ends, about my knees:
I swept it backward as the wind sweeps flame,
With the passion of my hands. Ah, Romney laughed
One day . . . (how full the memories come up!)
— 'Your Florence fire-flies live on in your hair,'
He said, 'it gleams so.' Well, I wrung them out,
My fire-flies; made a knot as hard as life
Of those loose, soft, impracticable curls,
And then sat down and thought . . . 'She shall not think
Her thought of me,' — and drew my desk and wrote.

'Dear Lady Waldemar, I could not speak
With people round me, nor can sleep to-night
And not speak, after the great news I heard
Of you and of my cousin. May you be
Most happy; and the good he meant the world
Replenish his own life. Say what I say,
And let my word be sweeter for your mouth,
As you are *you* . . . I only Aurora Leigh.'
That 's quiet, guarded: though she hold it up
Against the light, she 'll not see through it more
Than lies there to be seen. So much for pride;
And now for peace, a little. Let me stop
All writing back . . . 'Sweet thanks, my sweetest friend,
You 've made more joyful my great joy itself.'
— No, that 's too simple! she would twist it thus,
'My joy would still be as sweet as thyme in drawers,
However shut up in the dark and dry;
But violets, aired and dewed by love like yours,
Out-smell all thyme: we keep that in our clothes,
But drop the other down our bosoms till
They smell like —' . . . ah, I see her writing back
Just so. She 'll make a nosegay of her words,
And tie it with blue ribbons at the end
To suit a poet; — pshaw!
And then we 'll have
The call to church, the broken, sad, bad dream
Dreamed out at last, the marriage-vow complete
With the marriage breakfast; praying in white gloves,

Drawn off in haste for drinking pagan toasts
In somewhat stronger wine than any sipped
By gods since Bacchus had his way with grapes.

A postscript stops all that and rescues me.
'You need not write. I have been overworked,
And think of leaving London, England even,
And hastening to get nearer to the sun
Where men sleep better. So, adieu.' — I fold
And seal, — and now I 'm out of all the coil;
I breathe now, I spring upward like a branch
The ten-years school-boy with a crooked stick
May pull down to his level in search of nuts,
But cannot hold a moment. How we twang
Back on the blue sky, and assert our height,
While he stares after! Now, the wonder seems
That I could wrong myself by such a doubt.
We poets always have uneasy hearts,
Because our hearts, large-rounded as the globe,
Can turn but one side to the sun at once.
We are used to dip our artist-hands in gall
And potash, trying potentialities
Of alternated color, till at last
We get confused, and wonder for our skin
How nature tinged it first. Well — here 's the true
Good flesh-color; I recognize my hand, —
Which Romney Leigh may clasp as just a friend's,
And keep his clean.
                    And now, my Italy.
Alas, if we could ride with naked souls
And make no noise and pay no price at all,
I would have seen thee sooner, Italy,
For still I have heard thee crying through my life,
Thou piercing silence of ecstatic graves,
Men call that name!

                    But even a witch to-day
Must melt down golden pieces in the nard
Wherewith to anoint her broomstick ere she rides;
And poets evermore are scant of gold,
And if they find a piece behind the door
It turns by sunset to a withered leaf.
The Devil himself scarce trusts his patented
Gold-making art to any who make rhymes,
But culls his Faustus from philosophers
And not from poets. 'Leave my Job,' said God;
And so the Devil leaves him without pence,
And poverty proves plainly special grace.
In these new, just, administrative times
Men clamor for an order of merit: why?
Here 's black bread on the table and no wine!

At least I am a poet in being poor,
Thank God. I wonder if the manuscript
Of my long poem, if 't were sold outright,
Would fetch enough to buy me shoes to go
Afoot (thrown in, the necessary patch
For the other side the Alps)? It cannot be.
I fear that I must sell this residue
Of my father's books, although the Elzevirs
Have fly-leaves overwritten by his hand
In faded notes as thick and fine and brown
As cobwebs on a tawny monument
Of the old Greeks — *conferenda hæc cum his* —
Corruptè citat — lege potiùs,
And so on, in the scholar's regal way
Of giving judgment on the parts of speech,
As if he sat on all twelve thrones up-piled,
Arraigning Israel. Ay, but books and notes
Must go together. And this Proclus too,
In these dear quaint contracted Grecian types,
Fantastically crumpled like his thoughts
Which would not seem too plain; you go round twice
For one step forward, then you take it back
Because you 're somewhat giddy; there 's the rule
For Proclus. Ah, I stained this middle leaf
With pressing in 't my Florence iris-bell,
Long stalk and all: my father chided me

For that stain of blue blood, — I recollect
The peevish turn his voice took, 'Silly girls,
Who plant their flowers in our philosophy
To make it fine, and only spoil the book!
No more of it, Aurora.' Yes — no more!
Ah, blame of love, that 's sweeter than all praise
Of those who love not! 't is so lost to me,
I cannot, in such beggared life, afford
To lose my Proclus, — not for Florence even.

The kissing Judas, Wolff, shall go instead,
Who builds us such a royal book as this
To honor a chief-poet, folio-built,
And writes above 'The house of Nobody!'
Who floats in cream, as rich as any sucked
From Juno's breasts, the broad Homeric lines,
And, while with their spondaic prodigious mouths
They lap the lucent margins as babe-gods,
Proclaims them bastards. Wolff 's an atheist:
And if the Iliad fell out, as he says,
By mere fortuitous concourse of old songs,
Conclude as much too for the universe.

That Wolff, those Platos: sweep the upper shelves
As clean as this, and so I am almost rich,
Which means, not forced to think of being poor
In sight of ends. To-morrow: no delay.
I 'll wait in Paris till good Carrington
Dispose of such and, having chaffered for
My book's price with the publisher, direct
All proceeds to me. Just a line to ask
His help.
And now I come, my Italy,
My own hills! Are you 'ware of me, my hills,
How I burn toward you? do you feel to-night
The urgency and yearning of my soul,
As sleeping mothers feel the sucking babe
And smile? — Nay, not so much as when in heat
Vain lightnings catch at your inviolate tops
And tremble while ye are steadfast. Still ye go
Your own determined, calm, indifferent way
Toward sunrise, shade by shade, and light by light,
Of all the grand progression nought left out,
As if God verily made you for yourselves
And would not interrupt your life with ours.

SIXTH BOOK

The English have a scornful insular way
Of calling the French light. The levity
Is in the judgment only, which yet stands,
For say a foolish thing but oft enough
(And here 's the secret of a hundred creeds,
Men get opinions as boys learn to spell,
By reiteration chiefly), the same thing
Shall pass at last for absolutely wise,
And not with fools exclusively. And so
We say the French are light, as if we said
The cat mews or the milch-cow gives us milk:
Say rather, cats are milked and milch-cows mew;
For what is lightness but inconsequence,
Vague fluctuation 'twixt effect and cause
Compelled by neither? Is a bullet light
That dashes from the gun-mouth, while the eye
Winks and the heart beats one, to flatten itself
To a wafer on the white speck on a wall
A hundred paces off? Even so direct,
So sternly undivertible of aim,
Is this French people.
All, idealists
Too absolute and earnest, with them all
The idea of a knife cuts real flesh;
And still, devouring the safe interval
Which Nature placed between the thought and act
With those two fiery and impatient souls,
They threaten conflagration to the world,
And rush with most unscrupulous logic on
Impossible practice. Set your orators
To blow upon them with loud windy mouths,
Through watchword phrases, jest or sentiment,

Which drive our burly brutal English mobs
Like so much chaff, whichever way they blow, —
This light French people will not thus be driven.
They turn indeed, — but then they turn upon
Some central pivot of their thought and choice,
And veer out by the force of holding fast.
That 's hard to understand, for Englishmen
Unused to abstract questions, and untrained
To trace the involutions, valve by valve,
In each orbed bulb-root of a general truth,
And mark what subtly fine integument
Divides opposed compartments. Freedom's self
Comes concrete to us, to be understood,
Fixed in a feudal form incarnately
To suit our ways of thought and reverence,
The special form, with us, being still the thing.
With us, I say, though I 'm of Italy
By mother's birth and grave, by father's grave
And memory; let it be — a poet's heart
Can swell to a pair of nationalities,
However ill-lodged in a woman's breast.

And so I am strong to love this noble France,
This poet of the nations, who dreams on
And wails on (while the household goes to wreck)
For ever, after some ideal good, —
Some equal poise of sex, some unvowed love
Inviolate, some spontaneous brotherhood,
Some wealth that leaves none poor and finds none tired,
Some freedom of the many that respects
The wisdom of the few. Heroic dreams!
Sublime, to dream so; natural, to wake:
And sad, to use such lofty scaffoldings,
Erected for the building of a church,
To build instead a brothel or a prison —
May God save France!
And if at last she sighs
Her great soul up into a great man's face,
To flush his temples out so gloriously
That few dare carp at Cæsar for being bald,
What then? — this Cæsar represents, not reigns,
And is no despot, though twice absolute:
This Head has all the people for a heart;
This purple 's lined with the democracy, —
Now let him see to it! for a rent within
Would leave irreparable rags without.

A serious riddle: find such anywhere
Except in France; and when 't is found in France,
Be sure to read it rightly. So, I mused
Up and down, up and down, the terraced streets,
The glittering boulevards, the white colonnades
Of fair fantastic Paris who wears trees
Like plumes, as if man made them, spire and tower
As if they had grown by nature, tossing up
Her fountains in the sunshine of the squares,
As if in beauty's game she tossed the dice,
Or blew the silver down-balls of her dreams
To sow futurity with seeds of thought
And count the passage of her festive hours.

The city swims in verdure, beautiful
As Venice on the waters, the sea-swan.
What bosky gardens dropped in close-walled courts
Like plums in ladies' laps who start and laugh:
What miles of streets that run on after trees,
Still carrying all the necessary shops,
Those open caskets with the jewels seen!
And trade is art, and art 's philosophy,
In Paris. There 's a silk for instance, there,
As worth an artist's study for the folds
As that bronze opposite! nay, the bronze has faults,
Art 's here too artful, — conscious as a maid
Who leans to mark her shadow on the wall
Until she lose a vantage in her step.
Yet Art walks forward, and knows where to walk;
The artists also are idealists,
Too absolute for nature, logical
To austerity in the application of
The special theory, — not a soul content
To paint a crooked pollard and an ass,
As the English will because they find it so

And like it somehow. — There the old Tuileries
Is pulling its high cap down on its eyes,
Confounded, conscience-stricken, and amazed
By the apparition of a new fair face
In those devouring mirrors. Through the grate
Within the gardens, what a heap of babes,
Swept up like leaves beneath the chestnut-trees
From every street and alley of the town,
By ghosts perhaps that blow too bleak this way
A-looking for their heads! dear pretty babes,
I wish them luck to have their ball-play out
Before the next change. Here the air is thronged
With statues poised upon their columns fine,
As if to stand a moment were a feat,
Against that blue! What squares, — what breathing-room
For a nation that runs fast, — ay, runs against
The dentist's teeth at the corner in pale rows,
Which grin at progress, in an epigram.

I walked the day out, listening to the chink
Of the first Napoleon's bones in his second grave,
By victories guarded 'neath the golden dome
That caps all Paris like a bubble. 'Shall
These dry bones live?' thought Louis Philippe once,
And lived to know. Herein is argument
For kings and politicians, but still more
For poets, who bear buckets to the well
Of ampler draught.
These crowds are very good
For meditation (when we are very strong)
Though love of beauty makes us timorous,
And draws us backward from the coarse town-sights
To count the daisies upon dappled fields
And hear the streams bleat on among the hills
In innocent and indolent repose,
While still with silken elegiac thoughts
We wind out from us the distracting world
And die into the chrysalis of a man,
And leave the best that may, to come of us,
In some brown moth. I would be bold and bear
To look into the swarthiest face of things,
For God's sake who has made them.

Six days' work;
The last day shutting 'twixt its dawn and eve
The whole work bettered of the previous five!
Since God collected and resumed in man
The firmaments, the strata, and the lights,
Fish, fowl, and beast, and insect, — all their trains
Of various life caught back upon his arm,
Reorganized, and constituted MAN,
The microcosm, the adding up of works, —
Within whose fluttering nostrils, then at last
Consummating Himself the Maker sighed,
As some strong winner at the foot-race sighs
Touching the goal.
Humanity is great;
And, if I would not rather pore upon
An ounce of common, ugly, human dust,
An artisan's palm or a peasant's brow,
Unsmooth, ignoble, save to me and God,
Than track old Nilus to his silver roots,
Or wait on all the changes of the moon
Among the mountain-peaks of Thessaly
(Until her magic crystal round itself
For many a witch to see in) — set it down
As weakness, — strength by no means. How is this,
That men of science, osteologists
And surgeons, beat some poets in respect
For nature, — count nought common or unclean,
Spend raptures upon perfect specimens
Of indurated veins, distorted joints,
Or beautiful new cases of curved spine,
While we, we are shocked at nature's falling off,
We dare to shrink back from her warts and blains,
We will not, when she sneezes, look at her,
Not even to say 'God bless her'? That's our wrong;
For that, she will not trust us often with
Her larger sense of beauty and desire,
But tethers us to a lily or a rose
And bids us diet on the dew inside,

Left ignorant that the hungry beggar-boy
(Who stares unseen against our absent eyes,
And wonders at the gods that we must be,
To pass so careless for the oranges!)
Bears yet a breastful of a fellow-world
To this world, undisparaged, undespoiled,
And (while we scorn him for a flower or two,
As being, Heaven help us, less poetical)
Contains himself both flowers and firmaments
And surging seas and aspectable stars
And all that we would push him out of sight
In order to see nearer. Let us pray
God's grace to keep God's image in repute,
That so, the poet and philanthropist
(Even I and Romney) may stand side by side,
Because we both stand face to face with men,
Contemplating the people in the rough,
Yet each so follow a vocation, his
And mine.
I walked on, musing with myself
On life and art, and whether after all
A larger metaphysics might not help
Our physics, a completer poetry
Adjust our daily life and vulgar wants
More fully than the special outside plans,
Phalansteries, material institutes,
The civil conscriptions and lay monasteries
Preferred by modern thinkers, as they thought
The bread of man indeed made all his life,
And washing seven times in the 'People's Baths'
Were sovereign for a people's leprosy,
Still leaving out the essential prophet's word
That comes in power. On which, we thunder down,
We prophets, poets, — Virtue 's in the *word!*
The maker burnt the darkness up with his,
To inaugurate the use of vocal life;
And, plant a poet's word even, deep enough
In any man's breast, looking presently
For offshoots, you have done more for the man
Than if you dressed him in a broadcloth coat
And warmed his Sunday pottage at your fire.
Yet Romney leaves me . . .
God! what face is that?
O Romney, O Marian!
Walking on the quays
And pulling thoughts to pieces leisurely,
As if I caught at grasses in a field
And bit them slow between my absent lips
And shred them with my hands . . .
What face is that?
What a face, what a look, what a likeness! Full on mine
The sudden blow of it came down, till all
My blood swam, my eyes dazzled. Then I sprang . . .

It was as if a meditative man
Were dreaming out a summer afternoon
And watching gnats a-prick upon a pond,
When something floats up suddenly, out there,
Turns over . . . a dead face, known once alive . . .
So old, so new! it would be dreadful now
To lose the sight and keep the doubt of this:
He plunges — ha! he has lost it in the splash.

I plunged — I tore the crowd up, either side,
And rushed on, forward, forward, after her.
Her? whom?
A woman sauntered slow in front,
Munching an apple, — she left off amazed
As if I had snatched it: that 's not she, at least.
A man walked arm-linked with a lady veiled,
Both heads dropped closer than the need of talk:
They started; he forgot her with his face,
And she, herself, and clung to him as if
My look were fatal. Such a stream of folk,
And all with cares and business of their own!
I ran the whole quay down against their eyes;
No Marian; nowhere Marian. Almost, now,
I could call Marian, Marian, with the shriek

Of desperate creatures calling for the Dead.
Where is she, was she? was she anywhere?
I stood still, breathless, gazing, straining out
In every uncertain distance, till at last
A gentleman abstracted as myself
Came full against me, then resolved the clash
In voluble excuses, — obviously
Some learned member of the Institute
Upon his way there, walking, for his health
While meditating on the last 'Discourse;'
Pinching the empty air 'twixt finger and thumb,
From which the snuff being ousted by that shock
Defiled his snow-white waistcoat duly pricked
At the button-hole with honorable red;
'Madame, your pardon,' — there he swerved from me
A metre, as confounded as he had heard
That Dumas would be chosen to fill up
The next chair vacant, by his 'men *in us*.'
Since when was genius found respectable?
It passes in its place, indeed, — which means
The seventh floor back, or else the hospital:
Revolving pistols are ingenious things,
But prudent men (Academicians are)
Scarce keep them in the cupboard next the prunes.

And so, abandoned to a bitter mirth,
I loitered to my inn. O world, O world,
O jurists, rhymers, dreamers, what you please,
We play a weary game of hide-and-seek!
We shape a figure of our fantasy,
Call nothing something, and run after it
And lose it, lose ourselves too in the search,
Till clash against us comes a somebody
Who also has lost something and is lost,
Philosopher against philanthropist,
Academician against poet, man
Against woman, against the living the dead, —
Then home, with a bad headache and worse jest!

To change the water for my heliotropes
And yellow roses. Paris has such flowers:
But England, also. 'T was a yellow rose,
By that south window of the little house,
My cousin Romney gathered with his hand
On all my birthdays for me, save the last;
And then I shook the tree too rough, too rough,
For roses to stay after.
                                        Now, my maps.
I must not linger here from Italy
Till the last nightingale is tired of song,
And the last fire-fly dies off in the maize.
My soul 's in haste to leap into the sun
And scorch and seethe itself to a finer mood,
Which here, in this chill north, is apt to stand
Too stiffly in former moulds.
                                        That face persists,
It floats up, it turns over in my mind,
As like to Marian as one dead is like
The same alive. In very deed a face
And not a fancy, though it vanished so;
The small fair face between the darks of hair,
I used to liken, when I saw her first,
To a point of moonlit water down a well:
The low brow, the frank space between the eyes,
Which always had the brown, pathetic look
Of a dumb creature who had been beaten once
And never since was easy with the world.
Ah, ah — now I remember perfectly
Those eyes, to-day, — how overlarge they seemed,
As if some patient, passionate despair
(Like a coal dropped and forgot on tapestry,
Which slowly burns a widening circle out)
Had burnt them larger, larger. And those eyes,
To-day, I do remember, saw me too,
As I saw them, with conscious lids astrain
In recognition. Now a fantasy,
A simple shade or image of the brain,
Is merely passive, does not retro-act,
Is seen, but sees not.
                                        'T was a real face,
Perhaps a real Marian.
                                        Which being so,
I ought to write to Romney, 'Marian 's here;
Be comforted for Marian.'
                                        My pen fell,

My hands struck sharp together, as hands do
Which hold at nothing. Can I write to *him*
A half-truth? can I keep my own soul blind
To the other half, . . . the worse? What are our souls,
If still, to run on straight a sober pace
Nor start at every pebble or dead leaf,
They must wear blinkers, ignore facts, suppress
Six tenths of the road? Confront the truth, my soul!
And oh, as truly as that was Marian's face,
The arms of that same Marian clasped a thing
. . . Not hid so well beneath the scanty shawl,
I cannot name it now for what it was.

A child. Small business has a castaway
Like Marian with that crown of prosperous wives
At which the gentlest she grows arrogant
And says 'My child.' Who finds an emerald ring
On a beggar's middle finger and requires
More testimony to convict a thief?
A child 's too costly for so mere a wretch;
She filched it somewhere, and it means, with her,
Instead of honor, blessing, merely shame.

I cannot write to Romney, 'Here she is,
Here 's Marian found! I 'll set you on her track:
I saw her here, in Paris, . . . and her child.
She put away your love two years ago,
But, plainly, not to starve. You suffered then;
And, now that you 've forgot her utterly
As any last year's annual, in whose place
You 've planted a thick-flowering evergreen,
I choose, being kind, to write and tell you this
To make you wholly easy — she 's not dead,
But only . . . damned.'
                    Stop there: I go too fast;
I 'm cruel like the rest, — in haste to take
The first stir in the arras for a rat,
And set my barking, biting thoughts upon 't.
— A child! what then? Suppose a neighbor 's sick,
And asked her, 'Marian, carry out my child
In this Spring air,' — I punish her for that?
Or say, the child should hold her round the neck
For good child-reasons, that he liked it so
And would not leave her — she had winning ways —
I brand her therefore that she took the child?
Not so.
        I will not write to Romney Leigh,
For now he 's happy, — and she may indeed
Be guilty, — and the knowledge of her fault
Would draggle his smooth time. But I, whose days
Are not so fine they cannot bear the rain,
And who moreover having seen her face
Must see it again, . . . *will* see it, by my hopes
Of one day seeing heaven too. The police
Shall track her, hound her, ferret their own soil;
We 'll dig this Paris to its catacombs
But certainly we 'll find her, have her out,
And save her, if she will or will not — child
Or no child, — if a child, then one to save!

The long weeks passed on without consequence.
As easy find a footstep on the sand
The morning after spring-tide, as the trace
Of Marian's feet between the incessant surfs
Of this live flood. She may have moved this way, —
But so the star-fish does, and crosses out
The dent of her small shoe. The foiled police
Renounced me. 'Could they find a girl and child,
No other signalment but girl and child?
No data shown but noticeable eyes
And hair in masses, low upon the brow,
As if it were an iron crown and pressed?
Friends heighten, and suppose they specify:

Why, girls with hair and eyes are everywhere
In Paris; they had turned me up in vain
No Marian Erle indeed, but certainly
Mathildes, Justines, Victoires, . . . or, if I sought
The English, Betsis, Saras, by the score.
They might as well go out into the fields
To find a speckled bean, that 's somehow specked,
And somewhere in the pod.' — They left me so.
Shall *I* leave Marian? have I dreamed a dream?

— I thank God I have found her! I must say
'Thank God,' for finding her, although 't is true
I find the world more sad and wicked for 't.
But she —
                I 'll write about her, presently.
My hand 's a-tremble, as I had just caught up
My heart to write with, in the place of it.
At least you 'd take these letters to be writ
At sea, in storm! — wait now . . .
                                A simple chance
Did all. I could not sleep last night, and, tired
Of turning on my pillow and harder thoughts,
Went out at early morning, when the air
Is delicate with some last starry touch,
To wander through the Market-place of Flowers
(The prettiest haunt in Paris), and make sure
At worst that there were roses in the world.
So wandering, musing, with the artist's eye
That keeps the shade-side of the thing it loves,
Half-absent, whole-observing, while the crowd
Of young, vivacious, and black-braided heads
Dipped, quick as finches in a blossomed tree,
Among the nosegays, cheapening this and that
In such a cheerful twitter of rapid speech, —
My heart leapt in me, startled by a voice
That slowly, faintly, with long breaths that marked
The interval between the wish and word,
Inquired in stranger's French, 'Would *that* be much,
That branch of flowering mountain-gorse?'
— 'So much?
Too much for me, then!' turning the face round
So close upon me that I felt the sigh
It turned with.
        'Marian, Marian!' — face to face —
'Marian! I find you. Shall I let you go?'
I held her two slight wrists with both my hands;
'Ah Marian, Marian, can I let you go?'
— She fluttered from me like a cyclamen,
As white, which taken in a sudden wind
Beats on against the palisade. — 'Let pass,'
She said at last. 'I will not,' I replied;
'I lost my sister Marian many days,
And sought her ever in my walks and prayers,
And, now I find her . . . do we throw away
The bread we worked and prayed for, — crumble it
And drop it, . . . to do even so by thee
Whom still I 've hungered after more than bread,
My sister Marian? — can I hurt thee, dear?
Then why distrust me? Never tremble so.
Come with me rather where we 'll talk and live,
And none shall vex us. I 've a home for you
And me and no one else.' . . .
                                She shook her head.
'A home for you and me and no one else
Ill suits one of us: I prefer to such,
A roof of grass on which a flower might spring,
Less costly to me than the cheapest here;
And yet I could not, at this hour, afford
A like home even. That you offer yours,
I thank you. You are good as heaven itself —
As good as one I knew before. . . . Farewell.'
I loosed her hands: — 'In *his* name, no farewell!'
(She stood as if I held her.) 'For his sake,

For his sake, Romney's! by the good he meant,
Ay, always! by the love he pressed for once, —
And by the grief, reproach, abandonment,
He took in change' . . .
'He? — Romney! who grieved *him*?
Who had the heart for 't? what reproach touched *him*?
Be merciful, — speak quickly.'
'Therefore come,'
I answered with authority. — 'I think
We dare to speak such things and name such names
In the open squares of Paris!'
Not a word
She said, but in a gentle humbled way
(As one who had forgot herself in grief)
Turned round and followed closely where I went,
As if I led her by a narrow plank
Across devouring waters, step by step;
And so in silence we walked on a mile.

And then she stopped: her face was white as wax.
'We go much farther?'
'You are ill,' I asked,
'Or tired?'
She looked the whiter for her smile.
'There 's one at home,' she said, 'has need of me
By this time, — and I must not let him wait.'

'Not even,' I asked, 'to hear of Romney Leigh?'

'Not even,' she said, 'to hear of Mister Leigh.'

'In that case,' I resumed, 'I go with you,
And we can talk the same thing there as here.
None waits for me: I have my day to spend.'

Her lips moved in a spasm without a sound, —
But then she spoke. 'It shall be as you please;
And better so — 't is shorter seen than told:
And though you will not find me worth your pains,
That, even, may be worth some pains to know
For one as good as you are.'
Then she led
The way, and I, as by a narrow plank
Across devouring waters, followed her,
Stepping by her footsteps, breathing by her breath,
And holding her with eyes that would not slip;
And so, without a word, we walked a mile,
And so, another mile, without a word.

Until the peopled streets being all dismissed,
House-rows and groups all scattered like a flock,
The market-gardens thickened, and the long
White walls beyond, like spiders' outside threads,
Stretched, feeling blindly toward the country-fields,
Through half-built habitations and half-dug
Foundations, — intervals of trenchant chalk
That bit betwixt the grassy uneven turfs
Where goats (vine-tendrils trailing from their mouths)
Stood perched on edges of the cellarage
Which should be, staring as about to leap
To find their coming Bacchus. All the place
Seemed less a cultivation than a waste.
Men work here, only, — scarce begin to live:
All 's sad, the country struggling with the town,
Like an untamed hawk upon a strong man's fist,
That beats its wings and tries to get away,
And cannot choose be satisfied so soon
To hop through court-yards with its right foot tied,
The vintage plains and pastoral hills in sight.

We stopped beside a house too high and slim
To stand there by itself, but waiting till
Five others, two on this side, three on that,
Should grow up from the sullen second floor
They pause at now, to build it to a row.

The upper windows partly were unglazed
Meantime, — a meagre, unripe house: a line
Of rigid poplars elbowed it behind,
And, just in front, beyond the lime and bricks
That wronged the grass between it and the road,
A great acacia with its slender trunk
And overpoise of multitudinous leaves
(In which a hundred fields might spill their dew
And intense verdure, yet find room enough)
Stood reconciling all the place with green.
I followed up the stair upon her step.
She hurried upward, shot across a face,
A woman's, on the landing, — 'How now, now!
Is no one to have holidays but you?
You said an hour, and stayed three hours, I think,
And Julie waiting for your betters here?
Why if he had waked he might have waked, for me.'
— Just murmuring an excusing word, she passed
And shut the rest out with the chamber-door,
Myself shut in beside her.
'T was a room
Scarce larger than a grave, and near as bare;
Two stools, a pallet-bed; I saw the room:
A mouse could find no sort of shelter in 't,
Much less a greater secret; curtainless, —
The window fixed you with its torturing eye,
Defying you to take a step apart
If peradventure you would hide a thing.
I saw the whole room, I and Marian there
Alone.
Alone? She threw her bonnet off,
Then, sighing as 't were sighing the last time,
Approached the bed, and drew a shawl away:
You could not peel a fruit you fear to bruise
More calmly and more carefully than so, —
Nor would you find within, a rosier flushed
Pomegranate —
There he lay upon his back,
The yearling creature, warm and moist with life
To the bottom of his dimples, — to the ends
Of the lovely tumbled curls about his face;
For since he had been covered over-much
To keep him from the light-glare, both his cheeks
Were hot and scarlet as the first live rose
The shepherd's heart-blood ebbed away into
The faster for his love. And love was here
As instant; in the pretty baby-mouth,
Shut close as if for dreaming that it sucked,
The little naked feet, drawn up the way
Of nestled birdlings; everything so soft
And tender, — to the tiny holdfast hands,
Which, closing on a finger into sleep,
Had kept the mould of 't.
While we stood there dumb,
For oh, that it should take such innocence
To prove just guilt, I thought, and stood there dumb, —
The light upon his eyelids pricked them wide,
And, staring out at us with all their blue,
As half perplexed between the angelhood
He had been away to visit in his sleep,
And our most mortal presence, gradually
He saw his mother's face, accepting it
In change for heaven itself with such a smile
As might have well been learnt there, — never moved,
But smiled on, in a drowse of ecstasy,
So happy (half with her and half with heaven)
He could not have the trouble to be stirred,
But smiled and lay there. Like a rose, I said?
As red and still indeed as any rose,
That blows in all the silence of its leaves,
Content in blowing to fulfil its life.

She leaned above him (drinking him as wine)
In that extremity of love, 't will pass
For agony or rapture, seeing that love
Includes the whole of nature, rounding it
To love . . . no more, — since more can never be
Than just love. Self-forgot, cast out of self.

And drowning in the transport of the sight,
Her whole pale passionate face, mouth, forehead, eyes,
One gaze, she stood: then, slowly as he smiled
She smiled too, slowly, smiling unaware,
And drawing from his countenance to hers
A fainter red, as if she watched a flame
And stood in it aglow. 'How beautiful,'
Said she.
I answered, trying to be cold.
(Must sin have compensations, was my thought,
As if it were a holy thing like grief?
And is a woman to be fooled aside
From putting vice down, with that woman's toy
A baby?) — 'Ay! the child is well enough,'
I answered. 'If his mother's palms are clean
They need be glad of course in clasping such;
But if not, I would rather lay my hand,
Were I she, on God's brazen altar-bars
Red-hot with burning sacrificial lambs,
Than touch the sacred curls of such a child.'

She plunged her fingers in his clustering locks,
As one who would not be afraid of fire;
And then with indrawn steady utterance said,
'My lamb, my lamb! although, through such as thou,
The most unclean got courage and approach
To God, once, — now they cannot, even with men,
Find grace enough for pity and gentle words.'

'My Marian,' I made answer, grave and sad,
'The priest who stole a lamb to offer him,
Was still a thief. And if a woman steals
(Through God's own barrier-hedges of true love,
Which fence out license in securing love)
A child like this, that smiles so in her face,
She is no mother, but a kidnapper,
And he's a dismal orphan, not a son,
Whom all her kisses cannot feed so full
He will not miss hereafter a pure home
To live in, a pure heart to lean against,
A pure good mother's name and memory
To hope by, when the world grows thick and bad
And he feels out for virtue.'
'Oh,' she smiled
With bitter patience, 'the child takes his chance;
Not much worse off in being fatherless
Than I was, fathered. He will say, belike,
His mother was the saddest creature born;
He'll say his mother lived so contrary
To joy, that even the kindest, seeing her,
Grew sometimes almost cruel: he'll not say
She flew contrarious in the face of God
With bat-wings of her vices. Stole my child, —
My flower of earth, my only flower on earth,
My sweet, my beauty!' . . . Up she snatched the child,
And, breaking on him in a storm of tears,
Drew out her long sobs from their shivering roots,
Until he took it for a game, and stretched
His feet and flapped his eager arms like wings
And crowed and gurgled through his infant laugh:
'Mine, mine,' she said. 'I have as sure a right
As any glad proud mother in the world,
Who sets her darling down to cut his teeth
Upon her church-ring. If she talks of law,
I talk of law! I claim my mother-dues
By law, — the law which now is paramount, —
The common law, by which the poor and weak
Are trodden underfoot by vicious men,
And loathed for ever after by the good.
Let pass! I did not filch, — I found the child.'
'You found him, Marian?'
'Ay, I found him where
I found my curse, — in the gutter, with my shame!
What have you, any of you, to say to that,
Who all are happy, and sit safe and high,
And never spoke before to arraign my right
To grief itself? What, what, . . . being beaten down

By hoofs of maddened oxen into a ditch,
Half-dead, whole mangled, when a girl at last
Breathes, sees . . . and finds there, bedded in her flesh
Because of the extremity of the shock,
Some coin of price ! . . . and when a good man comes
(That 's God ! the best men are not quite as good)
And says “ I dropped the coin there: take it you,
And keep it, — it shall pay you for the loss,” —
You all put up your finger — “ See the thief !
Observe what precious thing she has come to filch.
How bad those girls are ! ” Oh, my flower, my pet,
I dare forget I have you in my arms
And fly off to be angry with the world,
And fright you, hurt you with my tempers, till
You double up your lip ? Why, that indeed
Is bad: a naughty mother ! ’
‘ You mistake,’
I interrupted; ‘ if I loved you not,
I should not, Marian, certainly be here.’

‘ Alas,’ she said, ‘ you are so very good;
And yet I wish indeed you had never come
To make me sob until I vex the child.
It is not wholesome for these pleasure-plats
To be so early watered by our brine.
And then, who knows ? he may not like me now
As well, perhaps, as ere he saw me fret, —
One 's ugly fretting ! he has eyes the same
As angels, but he cannot see as deep,
And so I 've kept for ever in his sight
A sort of smile to please him, — as you place
A green thing from the garden in a cup,
To make believe it grows there. Look, my sweet,
My cowslip-ball ! we 've done with that cross face,
And here 's the face come back you used to like.
Ah, ah ! he laughs ! he likes me. Ah, Miss Leigh,
You 're great and pure; but were you purer still, —
As if you had walked, we 'll say, no otherwhere
Than up and down the New Jerusalem,
And held your trailing lutestring up yourself
From brushing the twelve stones, for fear of some
Small speck as little as a needle-prick,
White stitched on white, — the child would keep to *me*,
Would choose his poor lost Marian, like me best,
And, though you stretched your arms, cry back and cling,
As we do when God says it 's time to die
And bids us go up higher. Leave us, then;
We two are happy. Does *he* push me off ?
He 's satisfied with me, as I with him.’

‘ So soft to one, so hard to others ! Nay,’
I cried, more angry that she melted me,
‘ We make henceforth a cushion of our faults
To sit and practise easy virtues on ?
I thought a child was given to sanctify
A woman, — set her in the sight of all
The clear-eyed heavens, a chosen minister
To do their business and lead spirits up
The difficult blue heights. A woman lives,
Not bettered, quickened toward the truth and good
Through being a mother ? . . . then she 's none ! although
She damps her baby's cheeks by kissing them,
As we kill roses.’
‘ Kill ! O Christ,’ she said,
And turned her wild sad face from side to side
With most despairing wonder in it, ‘ What,
What have you in your souls against me then,
All of you ? am I wicked, do you think ?
God knows me, trusts me with the child; but you,
You think me really wicked ? ’
‘ Complaisant,’
I answered softly, ‘ to a wrong you 've done,
Because of certain profits, — which is wrong
Beyond the first wrong, Marian. When you left

The pure place and the noble heart, to take
The hand of a seducer' . . .
'Whom? whose hand?
I took the hand of' . . .
Springing up erect,
And lifting up the child at full arm's length,
As if to bear him like an oriflamme
Unconquerable to armies of reproach, —
'By *him*,' she said, 'my child's head and its curls,
By these blue eyes no woman born could dare
A perjury on, I make my mother's oath,
That if I left that Heart, to lighten it,
The blood of mine was still, except for grief!
No cleaner maid than I was took a step
To a sadder end, — no matron-mother now
Looks backward to her early maidenhood
Through chaster pulses. I speak steadily;
And if I lie so, . . . if, being fouled in will
And paltered with in soul by devil's lust,
I dared to bid this angel take my part, . . .
Would God sit quiet, let us think, in heaven,
Nor strike me dumb with thunder? Yet I speak:
He clears me therefore. What, "seduced" 's your word!
Do wolves seduce a wandering fawn in France?
Do eagles, who have pinched a lamb with claws,
Seduce it into carrion? So with me.
I was not ever, as you say, seduced,
But simply, murdered.'
There she paused, and sighed
With such a sigh as drops from agony
To exhaustion, — sighing while she let the babe
Slide down upon her bosom from her arms,
And all her face's light fell after him
Like a torch quenched in falling. Down she sank,
And sat upon the bedside with the child.

But I, convicted, broken utterly,
With woman's passion clung about her waist
And kissed her hair and eyes, — 'I have been wrong,
Sweet Marian' . . . (weeping in a tender rage) . . .
'Sweet holy Marian! And now, Marian, now,
I'll use your oath although my lips are hard,
And by the child, my Marian, by the child,
I swear his mother shall be innocent
Before my conscience, as in the open Book
Of Him who reads for judgment. Innocent,
My sister! let the night be ne'er so dark
The moon is surely somewhere in the sky;
So surely is your whiteness to be found
Through all dark facts. But pardon, pardon me,
And smile a little, Marian, — for the child,
If not for me, my sister.'
The poor lip
Just motioned for the smile and let it go:
And then, with scarce a stirring of the mouth,
As if a statue spoke that could not breathe,
But spoke on calm between its marble lips, —
'I'm glad, I'm very glad you clear me so.
I should be sorry that you set me down
With harlots, or with even a better name
Which misbecomes his mother. For the rest,
I am not on a level with your love,
Nor ever was, you know, — but now am worse,
Because that world of yours has dealt with me
As when the hard sea bites and chews a stone
And changes the first form of it. I've marked
A shore of pebbles bitten to one shape
From all the various life of madrepores;
And so, that little stone, called Marian Erle,
Picked up and dropped by you and another friend,
Was ground and tortured by the incessant sea
And bruised from what she was, — changed! death 's a change,
And she, I said, was murdered; Marian 's dead.
What can you do with people when they are dead
But, if you are pious, sing a hymn and go;
Or, if you are tender, heave a sigh and go;

But go by all means, — and permit the grass
To keep its green feud up 'twixt them and you?
Then leave me, — let me rest. I'm dead, I say,
And if, to save the child from death as well,
The mother in me has survived the rest,
Why, that's God's miracle you must not tax,
I'm not less dead for that: I'm nothing more
But just a mother. Only for the child
I'm warm, and cold, and hungry, and afraid,
And smell the flowers a little and see the sun,
And speak still, and am silent, — just for him!
I pray you therefore to mistake me not
And treat me haply as I were alive;
For though you ran a pin into my soul,
I think it would not hurt nor trouble me.
Here's proof, dear lady, — in the market-place
But now, you promised me to say a word
About . . . a friend, who once, long years ago,
Took God's place toward me, when He leans and loves
And does not thunder, . . . whom at last I left,
As all of us leave God. You thought perhaps
I seemed to care for hearing of that friend?
Now, judge me! we have sat here half an hour
And talked together of the child and me,
And I not asked as much as 'What's the thing
"You had to tell me of the friend . . . the friend?"
He's sad, I think you said, — he's sick perhaps?
'T is nought to Marian if he's sad or sick.
Another would have crawled beside your foot
And prayed your words out. Why, a beast, a dog,
A starved cat, if he had fed it once with milk,
Would show less hardness. But I'm dead, you see,
And that explains it.'
Poor, poor thing, she spoke
And shook her head, as white and calm as frost
On days too cold for raining any more,
But still with such a face, so much alive,
I could not choose but take it on my arm
And stroke the placid patience of its cheeks, —
Then told my story out, of Romney Leigh,
How, having lost her, sought her, missed her still,
He, broken-hearted for himself and her,
Had drawn the curtains of the world awhile
As if he had done with morning. There I stopped,
For when she gasped, and pressed me with her eyes,
'And now . . . how is it with him? tell me now,'
I felt the shame of compensated grief,
And chose my words with scruple — slowly stepped
Upon the slippery stones set here and there
Across the sliding water. 'Certainly,
As evening empties morning into night,
Another morning takes the evening up
With healthful, providential interchange;
And, though he thought still of her — '
'Yes, she knew,
She understood: she had supposed indeed
That, as one stops a hole upon a flute,
At which a new note comes and shapes the tune,
Excluding her would bring a worthier in,
And, long ere this, that Lady Waldemar
He loved so' . . .
'Loved,' I started, — 'loved her so!
Now tell me' . . .
'I will tell you,' she replied:
'But since we're taking oaths, you'll promise first
That he in England, he, shall never learn
In what a dreadful trap his creature here,
Round whose unworthy neck he had meant to tie
The honorable ribbon of his name,
Fell unaware and came to butchery:
Because, — I know him, — as he takes to heart
The grief of every stranger, he's not like
To banish mine as far as I should choose
In wishing him most happy. Now he leaves

To think of me, perverse, who went my way,
Unkind, and left him, — but if once he knew . . .
Ah, then, the sharp nail of my cruel wrong
Would fasten me for ever in his sight,
Like some poor curious bird, through each spread wing
Nailed high up over a fierce hunter's fire,
To spoil the dinner of all tenderer folk
Come in by chance. Nay, since your Marian's dead,
You shall not hang her up, but dig a hole
And bury her in silence! ring no bells.'

I answered gayly, though my whole voice wept,
'We 'll ring the joy-bells, not the funeral-bells,
Because we have her back, dead or alive.'

She never answered that, but shook her head;
Then low and calm, as one who, safe in heaven,
Shall tell a story of his lower life,
Unmoved by shame or anger, — so she spoke.
She told me she had loved upon her knees,
As others pray, more perfectly absorbed
In the act and inspiration. She felt his
For just his uses, not her own at all, —
His stool, to sit on or put up his foot,
His cup, to fill with wine or vinegar,
Whichever drink might please him at the chance,
For that should please her always: let him write
His name upon her . . . it seemed natural;
It was most precious, standing on his shelf,
To wait until he chose to lift his hand.
Well, well, — I saw her then, and must have seen
How bright her life went floating on her love,
Like wicks the housewives send afloat on oil
Which feeds them to a flame that lasts the night.

To do good seemed so much his business,
That, having done it, she was fain to think,
Must fill up his capacity for joy.
At first she never mooted with herself
If *he* was happy, since he made her so,
Or if he loved her, being so much beloved.
Who thinks of asking if the sun is light,
Observing that it lightens? who 's so bold
To question God of his felicity?
Still less. And thus she took for granted first
What first of all she should have put to proof,
And sinned against him so, but only so.
'What could you hope,' she said, 'of such as she?
You take a kid you like, and turn it out
In some fair garden: though the creature 's fond
And gentle, it will leap upon the beds
And break your tulips, bite your tender trees;
The wonder would be if such innocence
Spoiled less: a garden is no place for kids.'
And, by degrees, when he who had chosen her
Brought in his courteous and benignant friends
To spend their goodness on her, which she took
So very gladly, as a part of his, —
By slow degrees it broke on her slow sense
That she too in that Eden of delight
Was out of place, and, like the silly kid,
Still did most mischief where she meant most love.
A thought enough to make a woman mad
(No beast in this but she may well go mad),
That saying, 'I am thine to love and use'
May blow the plague in her protesting breath
To the very man for whom she claims to die, —
That, clinging round his neck, she pulls him down
And drowns him, — and that, lavishing her soul,
She hales perdition on him. 'So, being mad,'
Said Marian . . .
'Ah — who stirred such thoughts, you ask?
Whose fault it was, that she should have such thoughts?
None 's fault, none 's fault. The light comes, and we see:
But if it were not truly for our eyes,

There would be nothing seen, for all the light.
And so with Marian: if she saw at last,
The sense was in her, — Lady Waldemar
Had spoken all in vain else.'
'O my heart,
O prophet in my heart,' I cried aloud,
'Then Lady Waldemar spoke!'
'*Did* she speak,'
Mused Marian softly, 'or did she only sign?
Or did she put a word into her face
And look, and so impress you with the word?
Or leave it in the foldings of her gown,
Like rosemary smells a movement will shake out
When no one 's conscious? who shall say, or guess?
One thing alone was certain — from the day
The gracious lady paid a visit first,
She, Marian, saw things different, — felt distrust
Of all that sheltering roof of circumstance
Her hopes were building into with clay nests:
Her heart was restless, pacing up and down
And fluttering, like dumb creatures before storms,
Not knowing wherefore she was ill at ease.'

'And still the lady came,' said Marian Erle,
'Much oftener than *he* knew it Mister Leigh.
She bade me never tell him she had come,
She liked to love me better than he knew,
So very kind was Lady Waldemar:
And every time she brought with her more light,
And every light made sorrow clearer . . . Well,
Ah, well! we cannot give her blame for that;
'T would be the same thing if an angel came,
Whose right should prove our wrong. And every time
The lady came, she looked more beautiful
And spoke more like a flute among green trees,
Until at last, as one, whose heart being sad
On hearing lovely music, suddenly
Dissolves in weeping, I brake out in tears
Before her, asked her counsel, — "Had I erred
In being too happy? would she set me straight?
For she, being wise and good and born above
The flats I had never climbed from, could perceive
If such as I might grow upon the hills;
And whether such poor herb sufficed to grow,
For Romney Leigh to break his fast upon 't, —
Or would he pine on such, or haply starve?"
She wrapped me in her generous arms at once,
And let me dream a moment how it feels
To have a real mother, like some girls:
But when I looked, her face was younger . . . ay,
Youth 's too bright not to be a little hard,
And beauty keeps itself still uppermost,
That 's true! — Though Lady Waldemar was kind
She hurt me, hurt, as if the morning-sun
Should smite us on the eyelids when we sleep,
And wake us up with headache. Ay, and soon
Was light enough to make my heart ache too:
She told me truths I asked for, — 't was my fault, —
"That Romney could not love me, if he would,
As men call loving: there are bloods that flow
Together like some rivers and not mix,
Through contraries of nature. He indeed
Was set to wed me, to espouse my class,
Act out a rash opinion, — and, once wed,
So just a man and gentle could not choose
But make my life as smooth as marriage-ring,
Bespeak me mildly, keep me a cheerful house,
With servants, brooches, all the flowers I liked,

And pretty dresses, silk the whole year round" . . .
At which I stopped her, — "This for me. And now
For *him*." — She hesitated, — truth grew hard;
She owned "'T was plain a man like Romney Leigh
Required a wife more level to himself.
If day by day he had to bend his height
To pick up sympathies, opinions, thoughts,
And interchange the common talk of life
Which helps a man to live as well as talk,
His days were heavily taxed. Who buys a staff
To fit the hand, that reaches but the knee?
He'd feel it bitter to be forced to miss
The perfect joy of married suited pairs,
Who, bursting through the separating hedge
Of personal dues with that sweet eglantine
Of equal love, keep saying, 'So *we* think,
It strikes *us*, — that's *our* fancy'" — When I asked
If earnest will, devoted love, employed
In youth like mine, would fail to raise me up
As two strong arms will always raise a child
To a fruit hung overhead, she sighed and sighed . . .
"That could not be," she feared. "You take a pink,
You dig about its roots and water it
And so improve it to a garden-pink,
But will not change it to a heliotrope,
The kind remains. And then, the harder truth —
This Romney Leigh, so rash to leap a pale,
So bold for conscience, quick for martyrdom,
Would suffer steadily and never flinch,
But suffer surely and keenly, when his class
Turned shoulder on him for a shameful match,
And set him up as nine-pin in their talk
To bowl him down with jestings." — There, she paused.
And when I used the pause in doubting that
We wronged him after all in what we feared —
"Suppose such things could never touch him more
In his high conscience (if the things should be)
Than, when the queen sits in an upper room
The horses in the street can spatter her!" —
A moment, hope came, — but the lady closed
That door and nicked the lock and shut it out,
Observing wisely that "the tender heart
Which made him over-soft to a lower class,
Would scarcely fail to make him sensitive
To a higher, — how they thought and what they felt."

'Alas, alas!' said Marian, rocking slow
The pretty baby who was near asleep,
The eyelids creeping over the blue balls, —
'She made it clear, too clear — I saw the whole!
And yet who knows if I had seen my way
Straight out of it by looking, though 't was clear,
Unless the generous lady, 'ware of this,
Had set her own house all afire for me
To light me forwards? Leaning on my face
Her heavy agate eyes which crushed my will,
She told me tenderly (as when men come
To a bedside to tell people they must die),
"She knew of knowledge, — ay, of knowledge knew,
That Romney Leigh had loved *her* formerly.
And *she* loved *him*, she might say, now the chance
Was past, — but that, of course, he never guessed, —
For something came between them, something thin
As a cobweb, catching every fly of doubt
To hold it buzzing at the window-pane
And help to dim the daylight. Ah, man's pride
Or woman's — which is greatest? most averse
To brushing cobwebs? Well, but she and he

Remained fast friends; it seemed not more than so,
Because he had bound his hands and could not stir.
An honorable man, if somewhat rash;
And she, not even for Romney, would she spill
A blot . . . as little even as a tear . . .
Upon his marriage-contract, — not to gain
A better joy for two than came by that:
For, though I stood between her heart and heaven,
She loved me wholly." '
Did I laugh or curse?
I think I sat there silent, hearing all,
Ay, hearing double, — Marian's tale, at once,
And Romney's marriage vow, '*I 'll keep to* THEE,'
Which means that woman-serpent. Is it time
For church now?
'Lady Waldemar spoke more,'
Continued Marian, 'but, as when a soul
Will pass out through the sweetness of a song
Beyond it, voyaging the uphill road,
Even so mine wandered from the things I heard
To those I suffered. It was afterward
I shaped the resolution to the act.
For many hours we talked. What need to talk?
The fate was clear and close; it touched my eyes;
But still the generous lady tried to keep
The case afloat, and would not let it go,
And argued, struggled upon Marian's side,
Which was not Romney's! though she little knew
What ugly monster would take up the end, —
What griping death within the drowning death
Was ready to complete my sum of death.'

I thought, — Perhaps he 's sliding now the ring
Upon that woman's finger . . .
She went on:
'The lady, failing to prevail her way,
Upgathered my torn wishes from the ground
And pieced them with her strong benevolence;
And, as I thought I could breathe freer air
Away from England, going without pause,
Without farewell, just breaking with a jerk
The blossomed offshoot from my thorny life, —
She promised kindly to provide the means,
With instant passage to the colonies
And full protection, — "would commit me straight
To one who once had been her waiting-maid
And had the customs of the world, intent
On changing England for Australia
Herself, to carry out her fortune so."
For which I thanked the Lady Waldemar,
As men upon their death-beds thank last friends
Who lay the pillow straight: it is not much,
And yet 't is all of which they are capable,
This lying smoothly in a bed to die.
And so, 't was fixed; — and so, from day to day,
The woman named came in to visit me.'

Just then the girl stopped speaking, — sat erect,
And stared at me as if I had been a ghost
(Perhaps I looked as white as any ghost),
With large-eyed horror. 'Does God make,' she said,
'All sorts of creatures really, do you think?
Or is it that the Devil slavers them
So excellently, that we come to doubt
Who 's stronger, He who makes, or he who mars?
I never liked the woman's face or voice
Or ways: it made me blush to look at her;
It made me tremble if she touched my hand;
And when she spoke a fondling word I shrank
As if one hated me who had power to hurt;
And, every time she came, my veins ran cold
As somebody were walking on my grave.
At last I spoke to Lady Waldemar:
"Could such an one be good to trust?" I asked.
Whereat the lady stroked my cheek and laughed

Her silver laugh (one must be born to laugh,
To put such music in it), — "Foolish girl,
Your scattered wits are gathering wool beyond
The sheep-walk reaches ! — leave the thing to me."
And therefore, half in trust, and half in scorn
That I had heart still for another fear
In such a safe despair, I left the thing.

'The rest is short. I was obedient:
I wrote my letter which delivered *him*
From Marian to his own prosperities,
And followed that bad guide. The lady ? — hush,
I never blame the lady. Ladies who
Sit high, however willing to look down,
Will scarce see lower than their dainty feet;
And Lady Waldemar saw less than I
With what a Devil's daughter I went forth
Along the swine's road, down the precipice,
In such a curl of hell-foam caught and choked,
No shriek of soul in anguish could pierce through
To fetch some help. They say there 's help in heaven
For all such cries. But if one cries from hell . . .
What then ? — the heavens are deaf upon that side.

'A woman . . . hear me, let me make it plain, . . .
A woman . . . not a monster . . . both her breasts
Made right to suckle babes . . . she took me off
A woman also, young and ignorant
And heavy with my grief, my two poor eyes
Near washed away with weeping, till the trees,
The blessed unaccustomed trees and fields
Ran either side the train like stranger dogs
Unworthy of any notice, — took me off
So dull, so blind, so only half-alive,
Not seeing by what road, nor by what ship,
Nor toward what place, nor to what end of all.
Men carry a corpse thus, — past the doorway, past
The garden-gate, the children's playground, up
The green lane, — then they leave it in the pit,
To sleep and find corruption, cheek to cheek
With him who stinks since Friday.
'But suppose;
To go down with one's soul into the grave,
To go down half-dead, half-alive, I say,
And wake up with corruption, . . . cheek to cheek
With him who stinks since Friday ! There it is
And that 's the horror of 't, Miss Leigh.
'You feel ?
You understand ? — no, do not look at me,
But understand. The blank, blind, weary way,
Which led, where'er it led, away at least;
The shifted ship, to Sydney or to France,
Still bound, wherever else, to another land;
The swooning sickness on the dismal sea,
The foreign shore, the shameful house, the night,
The feeble blood, the heavy-headed grief, . . .
No need to bring their damnable drugged cup,
And yet they brought it. Hell 's so prodigal
Of devil's gifts, hunts liberally in packs,
Will kill no poor small creature of the wilds
But fifty red wide throats must smoke at it,
As HIS at me . . . when waking up at last . . .
I told you that I waked up in the grave.

'Enough so ! — it is plain enough so. True,
We wretches cannot tell out all our wrong
Without offence to decent happy folk.
I know that we must scrupulously hint
With half-words, delicate reserves, the thing
Which no one scrupled we should feel in full.

Let pass the rest, then; only leave my oath
Upon this sleeping child, — man's violence,
Not man's seduction, made me what I am,
As lost as . . . I told *him* I should be lost.
When mothers fail us, can we help ourselves?
That 's fatal! — And you call it being lost,
That down came next day's noon and caught me there,
Half-gibbering and half-raving on the floor,
And wondering what had happened up in heaven,
That suns should dare to shine when God Himself
Was certainly abolished.
                    'I was mad,
How many weeks, I know not, — many weeks.
I think they let me go when I was mad,
They feared my eyes and loosed me, as boys might
A mad dog which they had tortured. Up and down
I went, by road and village, over tracts
Of open foreign country, large and strange,
Crossed everywhere by long thin poplar-lines
Like fingers of some ghastly skeleton Hand
Through sunlight and through moonlight evermore
Pushed out from hell itself to pluck me back,
And resolute to get me, slow and sure;
While every roadside Christ upon his cross
Hung reddening through his gory wounds at me,
And shook his nails in anger, and came down
To follow a mile after, wading up
The low vines and green wheat, crying "Take the girl!
She 's none of mine from henceforth." Then I knew
(But this is somewhat dimmer than the rest)
The charitable peasants gave me bread
And leave to sleep in straw: and twice they tied,
At parting, Mary's image round my neck —
How heavy it seemed! as heavy as a stone;
A woman has been strangled with less weight:
I threw it in a ditch to keep it clean
And ease my breath a little, when none looked;
I did not need such safeguards: — brutal men
Stopped short, Miss Leigh, in insult, when they had seen
My face, — I must have had an awful look.
And so I lived: the weeks passed on, — I lived.
'T was living my old tramp-life o'er again,
But, this time, in a dream, and hunted round
By some prodigious Dream-fear at my back,
Which ended yet: my brain cleared presently;
And there I sat, one evening, by the road,
I, Marian Erle, myself, alone, undone,
Facing a sunset low upon the flats
As if it were the finish of all time,
The great red stone upon my sepulchre,
Which angels were too weak to roll away.

SEVENTH BOOK

'The woman's motive? shall we daub ourselves
With finding roots for nettles? 't is soft clay
And easily explored. She had the means,
The moneys, by the lady's liberal grace,
In trust for that Australian scheme and me,
Which so, that she might clutch with both her hands
And chink to her naughty uses undisturbed,
She served me (after all it was not strange,
'T was only what my mother would have done)
A motherly, right damnable good turn.

'Well, after. There are nettles everywhere,
But smooth green grasses are more common still;
The blue of heaven is larger than the cloud;

A miller's wife at Clichy took me in
And spent her pity on me, — made me calm
And merely very reasonably sad.
She found me a servant's place in Paris, where
I tried to take the cast-off life again,
And stood as quiet as a beaten ass
Who, having fallen through overloads, stands up
To let them charge him with another pack.

'A few months, so. My mistress, young and light,
Was easy with me, less for kindness than
Because she led, herself, an easy time
Betwixt her lover and her looking-glass,
Scarce knowing which way she was praised the most.
She felt so pretty and so pleased all day
She could not take the trouble to be cross,
But sometimes, as I stooped to tie her shoe,
Would tap me softly with her slender foot
Still restless with the last night's dancing in 't,
And say "Fie, pale-face ! are you English girls
All grave and silent ? mass-book still, and Lent ?
And first-communion pallor on your cheeks,
Worn past the time for 't ? little fool, be gay ! "
At which she vanished like a fairy, through
A gap of silver laughter.
'Came an hour
When all went otherwise. She did not speak,
But clenched her brows, and clipped me with her eyes
As if a viper with a pair of tongs,
Too far for any touch, yet near enough
To view the writhing creature, — then at last,
"Stand still there, in the holy Virgin's name,
Thou Marian; thou 'rt no reputable girl,
Although sufficient dull for twenty saints !
I think thou mock'st me and my house," she said;
"Confess thou 'lt be a mother in a month,
Thou mask of saintship."
'Could I answer her ?
The light broke in so. It meant *that* then, *that ?*
I had not thought of that, in all my thoughts,
Through all the cold, dumb aching of my brow,
Through all the heaving of impatient life
Which threw me on death at intervals, — through all
The upbreak of the fountains of my heart
The rains had swelled too large: it could mean *that ?*
Did God make mothers out of victims, then,
And set such pure amens to hideous deeds ?
Why not ? He overblows an ugly grave
With violets which blossom in the spring.
And *I* could be a mother in a month ?
I hope it was not wicked to be glad.
I lifted up my voice and wept, and laughed,
To heaven, not her, until it tore my throat.
"Confess, confess ! " — what was there to confess,
Except man's cruelty, except my wrong ?
Except this anguish, or this ecstasy ?
This shame or glory ? The light woman there
Was small to take it in: an acorn-cup
Would take the sea in sooner.
'"Good," she cried;
"Unmarried and a mother, and she laughs !
These unchaste girls are always impudent.
Get out, intriguer ! leave my house and trot.
I wonder you should look me in the face,
With such a filthy secret."
'Then I rolled
My scanty bundle up and went my way,
Washed white with weeping, shuddering head and foot
With blind hysteric passion, staggering forth
Beyond those doors. 'T was natural of course
She should not ask me where I meant to sleep;
I might sleep well beneath the heavy Seine,
Like others of my sort; the bed was laid
For us. But any woman, womanly,
Had thought of him who should be in a month,

The sinless babe that should be in a month,
And if by chance he might be warmer housed
Than underneath such dreary dripping eaves.'

I broke on Marian there. 'Yet she herself,
A wife, I think, had scandals of her own, —
A lover not her husband.'
'Ay,' she said,
'But gold and meal are measured otherwise;
I learnt so much at school,' said Marian Erle.

'O crooked world,' I cried, 'ridiculous
If not so lamentable! 'T is the way
With these light women of a thrifty vice,
My Marian, — always hard upon the rent
In any sister's virtue! while they keep
Their own so darned and patched with perfidy,
That, though a rag itself, it looks as well
Across a street, in balcony or coach,
As any perfect stuff might. For my part,
I'd rather take the wind-side of the stews
Than touch such women with my finger-end!
They top the poor street-walker by their lie
And look the better for being so much worse:
The devil's most devilish when respectable.
But you, dear, and your story.'
'All the rest
Is here,' she said, and signed upon the child.
'I found a mistress-sempstress who was kind
And let me sew in peace among her girls.
And what was better than to draw the threads
All day and half the night for him and him?
And so I lived for him, and so he lives,
And so I know, by this time, God lives too.'

She smiled beyond the sun and ended so,
And all my soul rose up to take her part
Against the world's successes, virtues, fames.
'Come with me, sweetest sister,' I returned,
'And sit within my house and do me good
From henceforth, thou and thine! ye are my own
From henceforth. I am lonely in the world,
And thou art lonely, and the child is half
An orphan. Come, — and henceforth thou and I
Being still together will not miss a friend,
Nor he a father, since two mothers shall
Make that up to him. I am journeying south,
And in my Tuscan home I'll find a niche
And set thee there, my saint, the child and thee,
And burn the lights of love before thy face,
And ever at thy sweet look cross myself
From mixing with the world's prosperities;
That so, in gravity and holy calm,
We two may live on toward the truer life.'

She looked me in the face and answered not,
Nor signed she was unworthy, nor gave thanks,
But took the sleeping child and held it out
To meet my kiss, as if requiting me
And trusting me at once. And thus, at once,
I carried him and her to where I live;
She's there now, in the little room, asleep,
I hear the soft child-breathing through the door,
And all three of us, at to-morrow's break,
Pass onward, homeward, to our Italy.
Oh, Romney Leigh, I have your debts to pay,
And I'll be just and pay them.
But yourself!
To pay your debts is scarcely difficult,
To buy your life is nearly impossible,
Being sold away to Lamia. My head aches,
I cannot see my road along this dark;
Nor can I creep and grope, as fits the dark,
For these foot-catching robes of womanhood:
A man might walk a little . . . but I! — He loves
The Lamia-woman, — and I, write to him

What stops his marriage, and destroys his peace, —
Or what perhaps shall simply trouble him,
Until she only need to touch his sleeve
With just a finger's tremulous white flame,
Saying 'Ah, — Aurora Leigh! a pretty tale,
A very pretty poet! I can guess
The motive' — then, to catch his eye in hers
And vow she does not wonder, — and they two
To break in laughter as the sea along
A melancholy coast, and float up higher,
In such a laugh, their fatal weeds of love!
Ay, fatal, ay. And who shall answer me
Fate has not hurried tides, — and if to-night
My letter would not be a night too late,
An arrow shot into a man that 's dead,
To prove a vain intention? Would I show
The new wife vile, to make the husband mad?
No, Lamia! shut the shutters, bar the doors
From every glimmer on thy serpent-skin!
I will not let thy hideous secret out
To agonize the man I love — I mean
The friend I love . . . as friends love.
It is strange,
To-day while Marian told her story like
To absorb most listeners, how I listened chief
To a voice not hers, nor yet that enemy's,
Nor God's in wrath, . . . but one that mixed with mine
Long years ago among the garden trees,
And said to *me*, to *me* too, 'Be my wife,
Aurora.' It is strange with what a swell
Of yearning passion, as a snow of ghosts
Might beat against the impervious door of heaven,
I thought, 'Now, if I had been a woman, such
As God made women, to save men by love, —
By just my love I might have saved this man,
And made a nobler poem for the world
Than all I have failed in.' But I failed besides
In this; and now he 's lost! through me alone!
And, by my only fault, his empty house
Sucks in, at this same hour, a wind from hell
To keep his hearth cold, make his casements creak
For ever to the tune of plague and sin —
O Romney, O my Romney, O my friend,
My cousin and friend! my helper, when I would,
My love, that might be! mine!
Why, how one weeps
When one 's too weary! Were a witness by,
He 'd say some folly . . . that I loved the man,
Who knows? . . . and make me laugh again for scorn.
At strongest, women are as weak in flesh,
As men, at weakest, vilest, are in soul:
So, hard for women to keep pace with men!
As well give up at once, sit down at once,
And weep as I do. Tears, tears! *why* we weep?
'T is worth inquiry? — that we 've shamed a life,
Or lost a love, or missed a world, perhaps?
By no means. Simply, that we 've walked too far,
Or talked too much, or felt the wind i' the east, —
And so we weep, as if both body and soul
Broke up in water — this way.
Poor mixed rags
Forsooth we 're made of, like those other dolls
That lean with pretty faces into fairs.
It seems as if I had a man in me,
Despising such a woman.
Yet indeed,
To see a wrong or suffering moves us all
To undo it though we should undo ourselves,
Ay, all the more, that we undo ourselves;
That 's womanly, past doubt, and not ill-moved.
A natural movement therefore, on my part,
To fill the chair up of my cousin's wife,
And save him from a devil's company!
We 're all so, — made so — 't is our woman's trade
To suffer torment for another's ease.
The world's male chivalry has perished out,
But women are knights-errant to the last;

And if Cervantes had been Shakespeare too,
He had made his Don a Donna.
So it clears,
And so we rain our skies blue.
Put away
This weakness. If, as I have just now said,
A man 's within me, — let him act himself,
Ignoring the poor conscious trouble of blood
That 's called the woman merely. I will write
Plain words to England, — if too late, too late,
If ill-accounted, then accounted ill;
We 'll trust the heavens with something.
'Dear Lord Howe,
You 'll find a story on another leaf
Of Marian Erle, — what noble friend of yours
She trusted once, through what flagitious means,
To what disastrous ends; — the story 's true.
I found her wandering on the Paris quays,
A babe upon her breast, — unnatural,
Unseasonable outcast on such snow
Unthawed to this time. I will tax in this
Your friendship, friend, if that convicted She
Be not his wife yet, to denounce the facts
To himself, — but, otherwise, to let them pass
On tip-toe like escaping murderers,
And tell my cousin merely — Marian lives,
Is found, and finds her home with such a friend,
Myself, Aurora. Which good news, "She 's found,"
Will help to make him merry in his love:
I send it, tell him, for my marriage-gift,
As good as orange-water for the nerves,
Or perfumed gloves for headache, — though aware
That he, except of love, is scarcely sick:
I mean the new love this time, . . . since last year.
Such quick forgetting on the part of men!
Is any shrewder trick upon the cards
To enrich them? pray instruct me how 't is done:
First, clubs, — and while you look at clubs, 't is spades;
That 's prodigy. The lightning strikes a man,
And when we think to find him dead and charred . . .
Why, there he is on a sudden, playing pipes
Beneath the splintered elm-tree! Crime and shame
And all their hoggery trample your smooth world,
Nor leave more foot-marks than Apollo's kine
Whose hoofs were muffled by the thieving god
In tamarisk leaves and myrtle. I 'm so sad,
So weary and sad to-night, I 'm somewhat sour, —
Forgive me. To be blue and shrew at once
Exceeds all toleration except yours,
But yours, I know, is infinite. Farewell.
To-morrow we take train for Italy.
Speak gently of me to your gracious wife,
As one, however far, shall yet be near
In loving wishes to your house.'
I sign.
And now I loose my heart upon a page,
This —
'Lady Waldemar, I 'm very glad
I never liked you; which you knew so well
You spared me, in your turn, to like me much:
Your liking surely had done worse for me
Than has your loathing, though the last appears
Sufficiently unscrupulous to hurt,
And not afraid of judgment. Now, there 's space
Between our faces, — I stand off, as if
I judged a stranger's portrait and pronounced
Indifferently the type was good or bad.
What matter to me that the lines are false,
I ask you? did I ever ink my lips
By drawing your name through them as a friend's,
Or touch your hands as lovers do? Thank God
I never did: and since you 're proved so vile,
Ay, vile, I say, — we 'll show it presently, —
I 'm not obliged to nurse my friend in you,

Or wash out my own blots, in counting yours,
Or even excuse myself to honest souls
Who seek to press my lip or clasp my palm, —
"Alas, but Lady Waldemar came first!"

'T is true, by this time you may near me so
That you 're my cousin's wife. You 've gambled deep
As Lucifer, and won the morning star
In that case, — and the noble house of Leigh
Must henceforth with its good roof shelter you:
I cannot speak and burn you up between
Those rafters, I who am born a Leigh, — nor speak
And pierce your breast through Romney's, I who live,
His friend and cousin, — so, you 're safe. You two
Must grow together like the tares and wheat
Till God's great fire. — But make the best of time.

'And hide this letter: let it speak no more
Than I shall, how you tricked poor Marian Erle,
And set her own love digging its own grave
Within her green hope's pretty garden-ground, —
Ay, sent her forth with some one of your sort
To a wicked house in France, from which she fled
With curses in her eyes and ears and throat,
Her whole soul choked with curses, — mad in short,
And madly scouring up and down for weeks
The foreign hedgeless country, lone and lost, —
So innocent, male-fiends might slink within
Remote hell-corners, seeing her so defiled.

'But you, — you are a woman and more bold.
To do you justice, you 'd not shrink to face . . .
We 'll say, the unfledged life in the other room,
Which, treading down God's corn, you trod in sight
Of all the dogs, in reach of all the guns, —
Ay, Marian's babe, her poor unfathered child,
Her yearling babe! — you 'd face him when he wakes
And opens up his wonderful blue eyes:
You 'd meet them and not wink perhaps, nor fear
God's triumph in them and supreme revenge
When righting his creation's balance-scale
(You pulled as low as Tophet) to the top
Of most celestial innocence. For me,
Who am not as bold, I own those infant eyes
Have set me praying.
'While they look at heaven,
No need of protestation in my words
Against the place you 've made them! let them look.
They 'll do your business with the heavens, be sure:
I spare you common curses.
'Ponder this;
If haply you 're the wife of Romney Leigh
(For which inheritance beyond your birth
You sold that poisonous porridge called your soul),
I charge you, be his faithful and true wife!
Keep warm his hearth and clean his board, and, when
He speaks, be quick with your obedience;
Still grind your paltry wants and low desires
To dust beneath his heel; though, even thus,
The ground must hurt him, — it was writ of old,
"Ye shall not yoke together ox and ass,"
The nobler and ignobler. Ay, but you
Shall do your part as well as such ill things
Can do aught good. You shall not vex him, — mark,
You shall not vex him, jar him when he 's sad,
Or cross him when he 's eager. Understand
To trick him with apparent sympathies,
Nor let him see thee in the face too near
And unlearn thy sweet seeming. Pay the price
Of lies, by being constrained to lie on still:
'T is easy for thy sort: a million more
Will scarcely damn thee deeper.

'Doing which
You are very safe from Marian and myself;
We'll breathe as softly as the infant here,
And stir no dangerous embers. Fail a point,
And show our Romney wounded, ill-content,
Tormented in his home, we open mouth,
And such a noise will follow, the last trump's
Will scarcely seem more dreadful, even to you;
You'll have no pipers after: Romney will
(I know him) push you forth as none of his,
All other men declaring it well done,
While women, even the worst, your like, will draw
Their skirts back, not to brush you in the street,
And so I warn you. I'm . . . Aurora Leigh.'

The letter written, I felt satisfied.
The ashes, smouldering in me, were thrown out
By handfuls from me : I had writ my heart
And wept my tears, and now was cool and calm;
And, going straightway to the neighboring room,
I lifted up the curtains of the bed
Where Marian Erle, the babe upon her arm,
Both faces leaned together like a pair
Of folded innocences self-complete,
Each smiling from the other, smiled and slept.
There seemed no sin, no shame, no wrath, no grief.
I felt she too had spoken words that night,
But softer certainly, and said to God,
Who laughs in heaven perhaps that such as I
Should make ado for such as she. — 'Defiled'
I wrote? 'defiled' I thought her? Stoop,
Stoop lower, Aurora! get the angels' leave
To creep in somewhere, humbly, on your knees,
Within this round of sequestration white
In which they have wrapped earth's foundlings, heaven's elect.

The next day we took train to Italy
And fled on southward in the roar of steam.
The marriage-bells of Romney must be loud,
To sound so clear through all: I was not well,
And truly, though the truth is like a jest,
I could not choose but fancy, half the way,
I stood alone i' the belfry, fifty bells
Of naked iron, mad with merriment
(As one who laughs and cannot stop himself),
All clanking at me, in me, over me,
Until I shrieked a shriek I could not hear,
And swooned with noise, — but still, along my swoon,
Was 'ware the baffled changes backward rang
Prepared, at each emerging sense, to beat
And crash it out with clangor. I was weak;
I struggled for the posture of my soul
In upright consciousness of place and time,
But evermore, 'twixt waking and asleep,
Slipped somehow, staggered, caught at Marian's eyes
A moment (it is very good for strength
To know that some one needs you to be strong),
And so recovered what I called myself,
For that time.
I just knew it when we swept
Above the old roofs of Dijon: Lyons dropped
A spark into the night, half trodden out
Unseen. But presently the winding Rhone
Washed out the moonlight large along his banks
Which strained their yielding curves out clear and clean
To hold it, — shadow of town and castle blurred
Upon the hurrying river. Such an air
Blew thence upon the forehead — half an air
And half a water — that I leaned and looked,
Then, turning back on Marian, smiled to mark
That she looked only on her child, who slept,
His face toward the moon too.
So we passed
The liberal open country and the close,
And shot through tunnels, like a lightning-wedge
By great Thor-hammers driven through the rock,

Which, quivering through the intestine blackness, splits,
And lets it in at once: the train swept in
Athrob with effort, trembling with resolve,
The fierce denouncing whistle wailing on
And dying off smothered in the shuddering dark,
While we, self-awed, drew troubled breath, oppressed
As other Titans underneath the pile
And nightmare of the mountains. Out, at last,
To catch the dawn afloat upon the land!
— Hills, slung forth broadly and gauntly everywhere,
Not cramped in their foundations, pushing wide
Rich outspreads of the vineyards and the corn
(As if they entertained i' the name of France),
While down their straining sides streamed manifest
A soil as red as Charlemagne's knightly blood,
To consecrate the verdure. Some one said
'Marseilles!' And lo, the city of Marseilles,
With all her ships behind her, and beyond,
The scimitar of ever-shining sea
For right-hand use, bared blue against the sky!

That night we spent between the purple heaven
And purple water: I think Marian slept;
But I, as a dog awatch for his master's foot,
Who cannot sleep or eat before he hears,
I sat upon the deck and watched the night
And listened through the stars for Italy.
Those marriage-bells I spoke of sounded far,
As some child's go-cart in the street beneath
To a dying man who will not pass the day,
And knows it, holding by a hand he loves.
I too sat quiet, satisfied with death,
Sat silent: I could hear my own soul speak,
And had my friend, — for Nature comes sometimes
And says, 'I am ambassador for God.'
I felt the wind soft from the land of souls;
The old miraculous mountains heaved in sight,
One straining past another along the shore,
The way of grand dull Odyssean ghosts,
Athirst to drink the cool blue wine of seas
And stare on voyagers. Peak pushing peak
They stood: I watched, beyond that Tyrian belt
Of intense sea betwixt them and the ship,
Down all their sides the misty olive-woods
Dissolving in the weak, congenial moon
And still disclosing some brown convent tower
That seems as if it grew from some brown rock,
Or many a little lighted village, dropped
Like a fallen star upon so high a point,
You wonder what can keep it in its place
From sliding headlong with the waterfalls
Which powder all the myrtle and orange groves
With spray of silver. Thus my Italy
Was stealing on us. Genoa broke with day,
The Doria's long pale palace striking out,
From green hills in advance of the white town,
A marble finger dominant to ships,
Seen glimmering through the uncertain gray of dawn.

And then I did not think, 'My Italy,'
I thought 'My father!' O my father's house,
Without his presence! — Places are too much,
Or else too little, for immortal man —
Too little, when love's May o'ergrows the ground;
Too much, when that luxuriant robe of green
Is rustling to our ankles in dead leaves.
'T is only good to be or here or there,
Because we had a dream on such a stone,
Or this or that, — but, once being wholly waked
And come back to the stone without the dream,
We trip upon 't, — alas, and hurt ourselves;
Or else it falls on us and grinds us flat,

The heaviest gravestone on this burying earth.
—But while I stood and mused, a quiet touch
Fell light upon my arm, and, turning round,
A pair of moistened eyes convicted mine.
'What, Marian! is the babe astir so soon?'
'He sleeps,' she answered; 'I have crept up thrice,
And seen you sitting, standing, still at watch.
I thought it did you good till now, but now' . . .
But now,' I said, 'you leave the child alone.'
'And you're alone,' she answered,—and she looked
As if I too were something. Sweet the help
Of one we have helped! Thanks, Marian, for such help.

I found a house at Florence on the hill
Of Bellosguardo. 'T is a tower which keeps
A post of double observation o'er
That valley of Arno (holding as a hand
The outspread city) straight toward Fiesole
And Mount Morello and the setting sun,
The Vallombrosan mountains opposite,
Which sunrise fills as full as crystal cups
Turned red to the brim because their wine is red.
No sun could die nor yet be born unseen
By dwellers at my villa: morn and eve
Were magnified before us in the pure
Illimitable space and pause of sky,
Intense as angels' garments blanched with God,
Less blue than radiant. From the outer wall
Of the garden, drops the mystic floating gray
Of olive-trees (with interruptions green
From maize and vine), until 't is caught and torn
Upon the abrupt black line of cypresses
Which signs the way to Florence. Beautiful
The city lies along the ample vale,
Cathedral, tower and palace, piazza and street,
The river trailing like a silver cord
Through all, and curling loosely, both before
And after, over the whole stretch of land
Sown whitely up and down its opposite slopes
With farms and villas.
Many weeks had passed,
No word was granted.—Last, a letter came
From Vincent Carrington:—'My dear Miss Leigh,
You've been as silent as a poet should,
When any other man is sure to speak.
If sick, if vexed, if dumb, a silver piece
Will split a man's tongue,—straight he speaks and says
"Received that cheque." But you! . . . I send you funds
To Paris, and you make no sign at all.
Remember, I'm responsible and wait
A sign of you, Miss Leigh.
'Meantime your book
Is eloquent as if you were not dumb;
And common critics, ordinarily deaf
To such fine meanings, and, like deaf men, loth
To seem deaf, answering chance-wise, yes or no,
"It must be" or "it must not" (most pronounced
When least convinced), pronounce for once aright:
You'd think they really heard,—and so they do . . .
The burr of three or four who really hear
And praise your book aright: Fame's smallest trump
Is a great ear-trumpet for the deaf as posts,
No other being effective. Fear not, friend;
We think here you have written a good book,
And you, a woman! It was in you,—yes,
I felt 't was in you: yet I doubted half
If that od-force of German Reichenbach,
Which still from female finger-tips burns blue,
Could strike out as our masculine white heats
To quicken a man. Forgive me. All my heart
Is quick with yours since, just a fortnight since,
I read your book and loved it.
'Will you love

My wife, too? Here 's my secret I might keep
A month more from you! but I yield it up
Because I know you 'll write the sooner for 't,
Most women (of your height even) counting love
Life's only serious business Who 's my wife
That shall be in a month? you ask, nor guess?
Remember what a pair of topaz eyes
You once detected, turned against the wall,
That morning in my London painting-room;
The face half-sketched, and slurred; the eyes alone!
But you . . . you caught them up with yours, and said
"Kate Ward's eyes, surely." — Now I own the truth:
I had thrown them there to keep them safe from Jove,
They would so naughtily find out their way
To both the heads of both my Danaës
Where just it made me mad to look at them.
Such eyes! I could not paint or think of eyes
But those, — and so I flung them into paint
And turned them to the wall's care. Ay, but now
I 've let them out, my Kate's: I 've painted her
(I change my style and leave mythologies),
The whole sweet face; it looks upon my soul
Like a face on water, to beget itself.
A half-length portrait, in a hanging cloak
Like one you wore once; 't is a little frayed, —
I pressed too for the nude harmonious arm;
But she, she 'd have her way, and have her cloak —
She said she could be like you only so,
And would not miss the fortune. Ah, my friend,
You 'll write and say she shall not miss your love
Through meeting mine? in faith, she would not change.
She has your books by heart more than my words,
And quotes you up against me till I 'm pushed
Where, three months since, her eyes were, nay, in fact,
Nought satisfied her but to make me paint
Your last book folded in her dimpled hands
Instead of my brown palette as I wished,
And, grant me, the presentment had been newer;
She 'd grant me nothing: I compounded for
The naming of the wedding-day next month,
And gladly too. 'T is pretty to remark
How women can love women of your sort,
And tie their hearts with love-knots to your feet,
Grow insolent about you against men,
And put us down by putting up the lip,
As if a man — there *are* such, let us own,
Who write not ill — remains a man, poor wretch,
While you! — Write weaker than Aurora Leigh,
And there 'll be women who believe of you
(Besides my Kate) that if you walked on sand
You would not leave a foot-print.
'Are you put
To wonder by my marriage, like poor Leigh?
"Kate Ward!" he said. "Kate Ward!" he said anew.
"I thought" . . . he said, and stopped — "I did not think" . . .
And then he dropped to silence.
'Ah, he 's changed.
I had not seen him, you 're aware, for long,
But went of course. I have not touched on this
Through all this letter — conscious of your heart,
And writing lightlier for the heavy fact,
As clocks are voluble with lead.
'How poor,
To say I 'm sorry! dear Leigh, dearest Leigh.
In those old days of Shropshire — pardon me —
When he and you fought many a field of gold
On what you should do, or you should not do,
Make bread or verses (it just came to that),

I thought you 'd one day draw a silken peace
Through a golden ring. I thought so: foolishly,
The event proved; for you went more opposite
To each other, month by month, and year by year,
Until this happened. God knows best, we say,
But hoarsely. When the fever took him first,
Just after I had writ to you in France,
They tell me, Lady Waldemar mixed drinks
And counted grains, like any salaried nurse,
Excepting that she wept too. Then Lord Howe,
You 're right about Lord Howe, Lord Howe 's a trump,
And yet, with such in his hand, a man like Leigh
May lose as *he* does. There 's an end to all,
Yes, even this letter, though this second sheet
May find you doubtful. Write a word for Kate:
She reads my letters always, like a wife,
And if she sees her name I 'll see her smile
And share the luck. So, bless you, friend of two!
I will not ask you what your feeling is
At Florence with my pictures; I can hear
Your heart a-flutter over the snow-hills:
And, just to pace the Pitti with you once,
I 'd give a half-hour of to-morrow's walk
With Kate . . . I think so. Vincent Carrington.'

The noon was hot; the air scorched like the sun,
And was shut out. The closed persiani threw
Their long-scored shadows on my villa-floor,
And interlined the golden atmosphere
Straight, still, — across the pictures on the wall,
The statuette on the console (of young Love
And Psyche made one marble by a kiss),
The low couch where I leaned, the table near,
The vase of lilies Marian pulled last night
(Each green leaf and each white leaf ruled in black
As if for writing some new text of fate),
And the open letter, rested on my knee,
But there the lines swerved trembled, though I sat
Untroubled, plainly, reading it again,
And three times. Well, he 's married; that is clear.
No wonder that he 's married, nor much more
That Vincent 's therefore 'sorry.' Why, of course
The lady nursed him when he was not well,
Mixed drinks, — unless nepenthe was the drink
'T was scarce worth telling. But a man in love
Will see the whole sex in his mistress' hood,
The prettier for its lining of fair rose,
Although he catches back and says at last,
'I 'm sorry.' Sorry. Lady Waldemar
At prettiest, under the said hood, preserved
From such a light as I could hold to her face
To flare its ugly wrinkles out to shame,
Is scarce a wife for Romney, as friends judge,
Aurora Leigh or Vincent Carrington,
That 's plain. And if he 's 'conscious of my heart' . . .
It may be natural, though the phrase is strong
(One 's apt to use strong phrases, being in love);
And even that stuff of 'fields of gold,' 'gold rings,'
And what he 'thought,' poor Vincent, what he 'thought,'
May never mean enough to ruffle me.
— Why, this room stifles. Better burn than choke;
Best have air, air, although it comes with fire,
Throw open blinds and windows to the noon,
And take a blister on my brow instead
Of this dead weight! best, perfectly be stunned
By those insufferable cicale, sick
And hoarse with rapture of the summer-heat,
That sing, like poets, till their hearts break, — sing
Till men say 'It 's too tedious.'
                                        Books succeed,
And lives fail. Do I feel it so, at last?
Kate loves a worn-out cloak for being like mine.

While I live self-despised for being myself,
And yearn toward some one else, who yearns away
From what he is, in his turn. Strain a step
For ever, yet gain no step? Are we such,
We cannot, with our admirations even,
Our tip-toe aspirations, touch a thing
That 's higher than we? is all a dismal flat,
And God alone above each, as the sun
O'er level lagunes, to make them shine and stink —
Laying stress upon us with immediate flame,
While we respond with our miasmal fog,
And call it mounting higher because we grow
More highly fatal?
                              Tush, Aurora Leigh!
You wear your sackcloth looped in Cæsar's way,
And brag your failings as mankind's. Be still.
There *is* what 's higher, in this very world,
Than you can live, or catch at. Stand aside
And look at others — instance little Kate!
She 'll make a perfect wife for Carrington.
She always has been looking round the earth
For something good and green to alight upon
And nestle into, with those soft-winged eyes,
Subsiding now beneath his manly hand
'Twixt trembling lids of inexpressive joy.
I will not scorn her, after all, too much,
That so much she should love me: a wise man
Can pluck a leaf, and find a lecture in 't;
And I, too, . . . God has made me, — I 've a heart
That 's capable of worship, love, and loss;
We say the same of Shakespeare's. I 'll be meek
And learn to reverence, even this poor myself.

The book, too — pass it. 'A good book,' says he,
'And you a woman.' I had laughed at that,
But long since. I 'm a woman, it is true;
Alas, and woe to us, when we feel it most!
Then, least care have we for the crowns and goals
And compliments on writing our good books.
The book has some truth in it, I believe,
And truth outlives pain, as the soul does life.
I know we talk our Phædons to the end,
Through all the dismal faces that we make,
O'erwrinkled with dishonoring agony
From decomposing drugs. I have written truth,
And I a woman, — feebly, partially,
Inaptly in presentation, Romney 'll add,
Because a woman. For the truth itself,
That 's neither man's nor woman's, but just God's,
None else has reason to be proud of truth:
Himself will see it sifted, disenthralled,
And kept upon the height and in the light,
As far as and no farther than 't is truth;
For, now He has left off calling firmaments
And strata, flowers and creatures, very good,
He says it still of truth, which is his own.

Truth, so far, in my book; the truth which draws
Through all things upwards — that a twofold world
Must go to a perfect cosmos. Natural things
And spiritual, — who separates those two
In art, in morals, or the social drift,
Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,
Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,
Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with men,
Is wrong, in short, at all points. We divide
This apple of life, and cut it through the pips:
The perfect round which fitted Venus' hand
Has perished as utterly as if we ate
Both halves. Without the spiritual, observe,
The natural 's impossible — no form,
No motion: without sensuous, spiritual
Is inappreciable, — no beauty or power:
And in this twofold sphere the twofold man
(For still the artist is intensely a man)
Holds firmly by the natural, to reach
The spiritual beyond it, — fixes still

The type with mortal vision, to pierce through,
With eyes immortal, to the antitype
Some call the ideal, — better called the real,
And certain to be called so presently
When things shall have their names. Look long enough
On any peasant's face here, coarse and lined,
You 'll catch Antinous somewhere in that clay,
As perfect featured as he yearns at Rome
From marble pale with beauty; then persist,
And, if your apprehension 's competent,
You 'll find some fairer angel at his back,
As much exceeding him as he the boor,
And pushing him with empyreal disdain
For ever out of sight. Ay, Carrington
Is glad of such a creed; an artist must,
Who paints a tree, a leaf, a common stone,
With just his hand, and finds it suddenly
A-piece with and conterminous to his soul.
Why else do these things move him, leaf or stone ?
The bird 's not moved that pecks at a spring-shoot;
Nor yet the horse, before a quarry agraze:
But man, the twofold creature, apprehends
The twofold manner, in and outwardly,
And nothing in the world comes single to him,
A mere itself, — cup, column, or candlestick,
All patterns of what shall be in the Mount;
The whole temporal show related royally,
And built up to eterne significance
Through the open arms of God. 'There 's nothing great
Nor small,' has said a poet of our day,
Whose voice will ring beyond the curfew of eve
And not be thrown out by the matin's bell:
And truly, I reiterate, nothing 's small !
No lily-muffled hum of a summer-bee,
But finds some coupling with the spinning stars;
No pebble at your foot, but proves a sphere;
No chaffinch, but implies the cherubim;
And (glancing on my own thin, veinèd wrist)
In such a little tremor of the blood
The whole strong clamor of a vehement soul
Doth utter itself distinct. Earth 's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes —
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware
More and more from the first similitude.

Truth, so far, in my book ! a truth which draws
From all things upward. I, Aurora, still
Have felt it hound me through the wastes of life
As Jove did Io; and, until that Hand
Shall overtake me wholly and on my head
Lay down its large unfluctuating peace,
The feverish gad-fly pricks me up and down.
It must be. Art 's the witness of what Is
Behind this show. If this world's show were all,
Then imitation would be all in Art;
There, Jove's hand gripes us ! — For we stand here, we,
If genuine artists, witnessing for God's
Complete, consummate, undivided work;
That every natural flower which grows on earth
Implies a flower upon the spiritual side,
Substantial, archetypal, all aglow
With blossoming causes, — not so far away,
But we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat cleared,
May catch at something of the bloom and breath, —
Too vaguely apprehended, though indeed
Still apprehended, consciously or not,
And still transferred to picture, music, verse,
For thrilling audient and beholding souls
By signs and touches which are known to souls.
How known, they know not, — why, they cannot find,
So straight call out on genius, say 'A man
Produced this,' when much rather they should say
''T is insight and he saw this.'
Thus is Art
Self-magnified in magnifying a truth

Which, fully recognized, would change the world
And shift its morals. If a man could feel,
Not one day, in the artist's ecstasy,
But every day, feast, fast, or working-day,
The spiritual significance burn through
The hieroglyphic of material shows,
Henceforward he would paint the globe with wings,
And reverence fish and fowl, the bull, the tree,
And even his very body as a man —
Which now he counts so vile, that all the towns
Make offal of their daughters for its use,
On summer-nights, when God is sad in heaven
To think what goes on in his recreant world
He made quite other; while that moon He made
To shine there, at the first love's covenant,
Shines still, convictive as a marriage-ring
Before adulterous eyes.
How sure it is,
That, if we say a true word, instantly
We feel 't is God's, not ours, and pass it on
Like bread at sacrament we taste and pass
Nor handle for a moment, as indeed
We dared to set up any claim to such!
And I — my poem, — let my readers talk.
I 'm closer to it — I can speak as well:
I 'll say with Romney, that the book is weak,
The range uneven, the points of sight obscure,
The music interrupted.
Let us go.
The end of woman (or of man, I think)
Is not a book. Alas, the best of books
Is but a word in Art, which soon grows cramped,
Stiff, dubious-statured with the weight of years,
And drops an accent or digamma down
Some cranny of unfathomable time,
Beyond the critic's reaching. Art itself,
We 've called the larger life, must feel the soul
Live past it. For more 's felt than is perceived,
And more 's perceived than can be interpreted,
And Love strikes higher with his lambent flame
Than Art can pile the fagots.
Is it so?
When Jove's hand meets us with composing touch,
And when at last we are hushed and satisfied,
Then Io does not call it truth, but love?
Well, well! my father was an Englishman:
My mother's blood in me is not so strong
That I should bear this stress of Tuscan noon
And keep my wits. The town, there, seems to seethe
In this Medæan boil-pot of the sun,
And all the patient hills are bubbling round
As if a prick would leave them flat. Does heaven
Keep far off, not to set us in a blaze?
Not so, — let drag your fiery fringes, heaven,
And burn us up to quiet. Ah, we know
Too much here, not to know what 's best for peace;
We have too much light here, not to want more fire
To purify and end us. We talk, talk,
Conclude upon divine philosophies,
And get the thanks of men for hopeful books,
Whereat we take our own life up, and . . . pshaw!
Unless we piece it with another's life
(A yard of silk to carry out our lawn)
As well suppose my little handkerchief
Would cover Samminiato, church and all,
If out I threw it past the cypresses,
As, in this ragged, narrow life of mine,
Contain my own conclusions.
But at least
We 'll shut up the persiani and sit down,
And when my head 's done aching, in the cool,
Write just a word to Kate and Carrington.
May joy be with them! she has chosen well,
And he not ill.
I should be glad, I think,
Except for Romney. Had *he* married Kate,
I surely, surely, should be very glad.
This Florence sits upon me easily,

With native air and tongue. My graves are calm,
And do not too much hurt me. Marian 's good,
Gentle and loving, — lets me hold the child,
Or drags him up the hills to find me flowers
And fill these vases ere I 'm quite awake, —
My grandiose red tulips, which grow wild,
Or Dante's purple lilies, which he blew
To a larger bubble with his prophet breath,
Or one of those tall flowering reeds that stand
In Arno, like a sheaf of sceptres left
But some remote dynasty of dead gods
To suck the stream for ages and get green,
And blossom wheresoe'er a hand divine
Had warmed the place with ichor. Such I find
At early morning laid across my bed,
And wake up pelted with a childish laugh
Which even Marian's low precipitous 'hush'
Has vainly interposed to put away, —
While I, with shut eyes, smile and motion for
The dewy kiss that 's very sure to come
From mouth and cheeks the whole child's face at once
Dissolved on mine, — as if a nosegay burst
Its string with the weight of roses overblown,
And dropped upon me. Surely I should be glad.
The little creature almost loves me now,
And calls my name, 'Alola,' stripping off
The *r*'s like thorns, to make it smooth enough
To take between his dainty, milk-fed lips,
God love him! I should certainly be glad,
Except, God help me, that I 'm sorrowful
Because of Romney.
                    Romney, Romney! Well,
This grows absurd! — too like a tune that runs
I' the head, and forces all things in the world,
Wind, rain, the creaking gnat, or stuttering fly,
To sing itself and vex you, — yet perhaps
A paltry tune you never fairly liked,
Some 'I 'd be a butterfly,' or 'C'est l'amour:'
We 're made so, — not such tyrants to ourselves
But still we are slaves to nature. Some of us
Are turned, too, overmuch like some poor verse
With a trick of ritournelle: the same thing goes
And comes back ever.
                    Vincent Carrington
Is 'sorry,' and I 'm sorry; but *he* 's strong
To mount from sorrow to his heaven of love,
And when he says at moments, 'Poor, poor Leigh,
Who 'll never call his own so true a heart,
So fair a face even,' — he must quickly lose
The pain of pity, in the blush he makes
By his very pitying eyes. The snow, for him,
Has fallen in May and finds the whole earth warm,
And melts at the first touch of the green grass.
But Romney, — he has chosen, after all.
I think he had as excellent a sun
To see by, as most others, and perhaps
Has scarce seen really worse than some of us
When all 's said. Let him pass. I 'm not too much
A woman, not to be a man for once
And bury all my Dead like Alaric,
Depositing the treasures of my soul
In this drained watercourse, then letting flow
The river of life again with commerce-ships
And pleasure-barges full of silks and songs.
Blow, winds, and help us.
                    Ah, we mock ourselves
With talking of the winds; perhaps as much
With other resolutions. How it weighs,
This hot, sick air! and how I covet here
The Dead's provision on the river-couch,
With silver curtains drawn on tinkling rings!
Or else their rest in quiet crypts, — laid by
From heat and noise; — from those cicale, say,
And this more vexing heart-beat.
                    So it is:
We covet for the soul, the body's part,
To die and rot. Even so, Aurora, ends

Our aspiration who bespoke our place
So far in the east. The occidental flats
Had fed us fatter, therefore? we have climbed
Where herbage ends? we want the beast's part now
And tire of the angel's?—Men define a man,
The creature who stands frontward to the stars,
The creature who looks inward to himself,
The tool-wright, laughing creature. 'T is enough:
We'll say instead, the inconsequent creature, man,
For that's his specialty. What creature else
Conceives the circle, and then walks the square?
Loves things proved bad, and leaves a thing proved good?
You think the bee makes honey half a year,
To loathe the comb in winter and desire
The little ant's food rather? But a man—
Note men!—they are but women after all,
As women are but Auroras!—there are men
Born tender, apt to pale at a trodden worm,
Who paint for pastime, in their favorite dream,
Spruce auto-vestments flowered with crocus-flames.
There are, too, who believe in hell, and lie;
There are, too, who believe in heaven, and fear:
There are, who waste their souls in working out
Life's problem on these sands betwixt two tides,
Concluding,—'Give us the oyster's part, in death.'

Alas, long-suffering and most patient God,
Thou needst be surelier God to bear with us
Than even to have made us! thou aspire, aspire
From henceforth for me! thou who hast thyself
Endured this fleshhood, knowing how as a soaked
And sucking vesture it can drag us down
And choke us in the melancholy Deep,
Sustain me, that with thee I walk these waves,
Resisting!—breathe me upward, thou in me
Aspiring who art the way, the truth, the life,—
That no truth henceforth seem indifferent,
No way to truth laborious, and no life,
Not even this life I live, intolerable!

The days went by. I took up the old days,
With all their Tuscan pleasures worn and spoiled,
Like some lost book we dropped in the long grass
On such a happy summer afternoon
When last we read it with a loving friend,
And find in autumn when the friend is gone,
The grass cut short, the weather changed, too late,
And stare at, as at something wonderful
For sorrow,—thinking how two hands before
Had held up what is left to only one,
And how we smiled when such a vehement nail
Impressed the tiny dint here which presents
This verse in fire forever. Tenderly
And mournfully I lived. I knew the birds
And insects,—which looked fathered by the flowers
And emulous of their hues: I recognized
The moths, with that great overpoise of wings
Which make a mystery of them how at all
They can stop flying: butterflies, that bear
Upon their blue wings such red embers round,
They seem to scorch the blue air into holes
Each flight they take: and fireflies, that suspire
In short soft lapses of transported flame
Across the tingling Dark, while overhead
The constant and inviolable stars
Outburn those light-of-love: melodious owls
(If music had but one note and was sad,
'T would sound just so), and all the silent swirl
Of bats that seem to follow in the air
Some grand circumference of a shadowy dome
To which we are blind: and then the nightingales,
Which pluck our heart across a garden-wall
(When walking in the town) and carry it
So high into the bowery almond-trees

We tremble and are afraid, and feel as if
The golden flood of moonlight unaware
Dissolved the pillars of the steady earth
And made it less substantial. And I knew
The harmless opal snakes, the large-mouthed frogs
(Those noisy vaunters of their shallow streams);
And lizards, the green lightnings of the wall,
Which, if you sit down quiet, nor sigh loud,
Will flatter you and take you for a stone,
And flash familiarly about your feet
With such prodigious eyes in such small heads! —
I knew them (though they had somewhat dwindled from
My childish imagery), and kept in mind
How last I sat among them equally,
In fellowship and mateship, as a child
Feels equal still toward insect, beast, and bird,
Before the Adam in him has forgone
All privilege of Eden, — making friends
And talk with such a bird or such a goat,
And buying many a two-inch-wide rush-cage
To let out the caged cricket on a tree,
Saying 'Oh my dear grillino, were you cramped?
And are you happy with the ilex-leaves?
And do you love me who have let you go?
Say *yes* in singing, and I 'll understand.'

But now the creatures all seemed farther off,
No longer mine, nor like me, only *there*,
A gulf between us. I could yearn indeed,
Like other rich men, for a drop of dew
To cool this heat, — a drop of the early dew,
The irrecoverable child-innocence
(Before the heart took fire and withered life)
When childhood might pair equally with birds;
But now . . . the birds were grown too proud for us,
Alas, the very sun forbids the dew.
And I, I had come back to an empty nest,
Which every bird 's too wise for. How I heard
My father's step on that deserted ground,
His voice along that silence, as he told
The names of bird and insect, tree and flower,
And all the presentations of the stars
Across Valdarno, interposing still
My child,' 'my child.' When fathers say 'my child,'
'T is easier to conceive the universe,
And life's transitions down the steps of law.

I rode once to the little mountain-house
As fast as if to find my father there,
But, when in sight of 't, within fifty yards,
I dropped my horse's bridle on his neck
And paused upon his flank. The house's front
Was cased with lingots of ripe Indian corn
In tessellated order and device
Of golden patterns, not a stone of wall
Uncovered, — not an inch of room to grow
A vine-leaf. The old porch had disappeared;
And right in the open doorway sat a girl
At plaiting straws, her black hair strained away
To a scarlet kerchief caught beneath her chin
In Tuscan fashion, — her full ebon eyes,
Which looked too heavy to be lifted so,
Still dropped and lifted toward the mulberry-tree
On which the lads were busy with their staves
In shout and laughter, stripping every bough
As bare as winter, of those summer leaves
My father had not changed for all the silk
In which the ugly silkworms hide themselves.
Enough. My horse recoiled before my heart;
I turned the rein abruptly. Back we went
As fast, to Florence.
That was trial enough
Of graves. I would not visit, if I could,
My father's, or my mother's any more,
To see if stone cutter or lichen beat
So early in the race, or throw my flowers,
Which could not out-smell heaven or sweeten earth.
They live too far above, that I should look
So far below to find them: let me think

That rather they are visiting my grave,
Called life here (undeveloped yet to life),
And that they drop upon me, now and then,
For token or for solace, some small weed
Least odorous of the growths of paradise,
To spare such pungent scents as kill with joy.

My old Assunta, too, was dead, was dead —
O land of all men's past! for me alone,
It would not mix its tenses. I was past,
It seemed, like others, — only not in heaven.
And many a Tuscan eve I wandered down
The cypress alley like a restless ghost
That tries its feeble ineffectual breath
Upon its own charred funeral-brands put out
Too soon, where black and stiff stood up the trees
Against the broad vermilion of the skies.
Such skies! — all clouds abolished in a sweep
Of God's skirt, with a dazzle to ghosts and men,
As down I went, saluting on the bridge
The hem of such before 't was caught away
Beyond the peaks of Lucca. Underneath,
The river, just escaping from the weight
Of that intolerable glory, ran
In acquiescent shadow murmurously;
While, up beside it, streamed the festa-folk
With fellow-murmurs from their feet and fans,
And *issimo* and *ino* and sweet poise
Of vowels in their pleasant scandalous talk;
Returning from the grand-duke's dairy-farm
Before the trees grew dangerous at eight
(For 'trust no tree by moonlight,' Tuscans say),
To eat their ice at Donay's tenderly, —
Each lovely lady close to a cavalier
Who holds her dear fan while she feeds her smile
On meditative spoonfuls of vanille
And listens to his hot-breathed vows of love
Enough to thaw her cream and scorch his beard.
'T was little matter. I could pass them by
Indifferently, not fearing to be known.
No danger of being wrecked upon a friend,
And forced to take an iceberg for an isle!
The very English, here, must wait and learn
To hang the cobweb of their gossip out
To catch a fly. I 'm happy. It 's sublime,
This perfect solitude of foreign lands!
To be, as if you had not been till then,
And were then, simply that you chose to be:
To spring up, not be brought forth from the ground,
Like grasshoppers at Athens, and skip thrice
Before a woman makes a pounce on you
And plants you in her hair! — possess, yourself,
A new world all alive with creatures new,
New sun, new moon, new flowers, new people — ah,
And be possessed by none of them! no right
In one, to call your name, inquire your where,
Or what you think of Mister Someone's book,
Or Mister Other's marriage or decease,
Or how 's the headache which you had last week,
Or why you look so pale still, since it 's gone?
— Such most surprising riddance of one's life
Comes next one's death; 't is disembodiment
Without the pang. I marvel, people choose
To stand stock-still like fakirs, till the moss
Grows on them and they cry out, self-admired,
'How verdant and how virtuous!' Well, I 'm glad;
Or should be, if grown foreign to myself
As surely as to others.
                                        Musing so,
I walked the narrow unrecognizing streets,
Where many a palace-front peers gloomily
Through stony visors iron-barred (prepared

Alike, should foe or lover pass that way,
For guest or victim), and came wandering out
Upon the churches with mild open doors
And plaintive wail of vespers, where a few,
Those chiefly women, sprinkled round in blots
Upon the dusky pavement, knelt and prayed
Toward the altar's silver glory. Oft a ray
(I liked to sit and watch) would tremble out,
Just touch some face more lifted, more in need
(Of course a woman's), — while I dreamed a tale
To fit its fortunes. There was one who looked
As if the earth had suddenly grown too large
For such a little humpbacked thing as she;
The pitiful black kerchief round her neck
Sole proof she had had a mother. One, again,
Looked sick for love, — seemed praying some soft saint
To put more virtue in the new fine scarf
She spent a fortnight's meals on, yesterday,
That cruel Gigi might return his eyes
From Giuliana. There was one, so old,
So old, to kneel grew easier than to stand, —
So solitary, she accepts at last
Our Lady for her gossip, and frets on
Against the sinful world which goes its rounds
In marrying and being married, just the same
As when 't was almost good and had the right
(Her Gian alive, and she herself eighteen).
'And yet, now even, if Madonna willed,
She'd win a tern in Thursday's lottery
And better all things. Did she dream for nought,
That, boiling cabbage for the fast-day's soup,
It smelt like blessèd entrails? such a dream
For nought? would sweetest Mary cheat her so,
And lose that certain candle, straight and white
As any fair grand-duchess in her teens,
Which otherwise should flare here in a week?
Benigna sis, thou beauteous Queen of Heaven!'

I sat there musing, and imagining
Such utterance from such faces: poor blind souls
That writhe toward heaven along the devil's trail, —
Who knows, I thought, but He may stretch his hand
And pick them up? 't is written in the Book
He heareth the young ravens when they cry,
And yet they cry for carrion. — O my God,
And we, who make excuses for the rest,
We do it in our measure. Then I knelt,
And dropped my head upon the pavement too,
And prayed, since I was foolish in desire
Like other creatures, craving offal-food,
That He would stop his ears to what I said,
And only listen to the run and beat
Of this poor, passionate, helpless blood — And then
I lay, and spoke not: but He heard in heaven.

So many Tuscan evenings passed the same.
I could not lose a sunset on the bridge,
And would not miss a vigil in the church,
And liked to mingle with the outdoor crowd
So strange and gay and ignorant of my face,
For men you know not are as good as trees.
And only once, at the Santissima,
I almost chanced upon a man I knew,
Sir Blaise Delorme. He saw me certainly,
And somewhat hurried, as he crossed himself,
The smoothness of the action, — then half bowed,
But only half, and merely to my shade,
I slipped so quick behind the porphyry plinth
And left him dubious if 't was really I
Or peradventure Satan's usual trick
To keep a mounting saint uncanonized.
But he was safe for that time, and I too;

The argent angels in the altar-flare
Absorbed his soul next moment. The good man !
In England we were scarce acquaintances,
That here in Florence he should keep my thought
Beyond the image on his eye, which came
And went: and yet his thought disturbed my life:
For, after that, I oftener sat at home
On evenings, watching how they fined themselves
With gradual conscience to a perfect night,
Until the moon, diminished to a curve,
Lay out there like a sickle for his hand
Who cometh down at last to reap the earth.
At such times, ended seemed my trade of verse;
I feared to jingle bells upon my robe
Before the four-faced silent cherubim.
With God so near me, could I sing of God ?
I did not write, nor read, nor even think,
But sat absorbed amid the quickening glooms,
Most like some passive broken lump of salt
Dropped in by chance to a bowl of œnomel,
To spoil the drink a little and lose itself,
Dissolving slowly, slowly, until lost.

EIGHTH BOOK

One eve it happened, when I sat alone,
Alone, upon the terrace of my tower,
A book upon my knees to counterfeit
The reading that I never read at all,
While Marian, in the garden down below,
Knelt by the fountain I could just hear thrill
The drowsy silence of the exhausted day,
And peeled a new fig from that purple heap
In the grass beside her, turning out the red
To feed her eager child (who sucked at it
With vehement lips across a gap of air
As he stood opposite, face and curls a-flame
With that last sun-ray, crying 'Give me, give,'
And stamping with imperious baby-feet,
We 're all born princes) — something startled me,
The laugh of sad and innocent souls, that breaks
Abruptly, as if frightened at itself.
'T was Marian laughed. I saw her glance above
In sudden shame that I should hear her laugh,
And straightway dropped my eyes upon my book,
And knew, the first time, 't was Boccaccio's tale,
The Falcon's, of the lover who for love
Destroyed the best that loved him. Some of us
Do it still, and then we sit and laugh no more.
Laugh *you*, sweet Marian, — you 've the right to laugh,
Since God Himself is for you, and a child !
For me there 's somewhat less, — and so I sigh.

The heavens were making room to hold the night,
The sevenfold heavens unfolding all their gates
To let the stars out slowly (prophesied
In close-approaching advent, not discerned),
While still the cue-owls from the cypresses
Of the Poggio called and counted every pulse
Of the skyey palpitation. Gradually
The purple and transparent shadows slow
Had filled up the whole valley to the brim,
And flooded all the city, which you saw
As some drowned city in some enchanted sea,
Cut off from nature, — drawing you who gaze,
With passionate desire, to leap and plunge
And find a sea-king with a voice of waves,
And treacherous soft eyes, and slippery locks
You cannot kiss but you shall bring away
Their salt upon your lips. The duomo bell
Strikes ten, as if it struck ten fathoms down,
So deep; and twenty churches answer it
The same, with twenty various instances.
Some gaslights tremble along squares and streets;
The Pitti's palace-front is drawn in fire;
And, past the quays, Maria Novella Place,
In which the mystic obelisks stand up
Triangular, pyramidal, each based
Upon its four-square brazen tortoises,
To guard that fair church, Buonarroti's Bride,
That stares out from her large blind dial-eyes,

(Her quadrant and armillary dials, black
With rhythms of many suns and moons) in vain
Inquiry for so rich a soul as his.
Methinks I have plunged, I see it all so clear . . .
And, O my heart, . . . the sea-king !
In my ears
The sound of waters. There he stood, my king !

I felt him, rather than beheld him. Up
I rose, as if he were my king indeed,
And then sat down, in trouble at myself,
And struggling for my woman's empery.
'T is pitiful; but women are so made:
We 'll die for you perhaps, — 't is probable;
But we 'll not spare you an inch of our full height:
We 'll have our whole just stature, — five feet four,
Though laid out in our coffins: pitiful.
— 'You, Romney ! — Lady Waldemar is here ?'

He answered in a voice which was not his.
'I have her letter; you shall read it soon.
But first, I must be heard a little, I,
Who have waited long and travelled far for that,
Although you thought to have shut a tedious book
And farewell. Ah, you dog-eared such a page,
And here you find me.'
Did he touch my hand,
Or but my sleeve ? I trembled, hand and foot, —
He must have touched me. — 'Will you sit ?' I asked,
And motioned to a chair; but down he sat,
A little slowly, as a man in doubt,
Upon the couch beside me, — couch and chair
Being wheeled upon the terrace.
'You are come,
My cousin Romney ? — this is wonderful.
But all is wonder on such summer-nights;
And nothing should surprise us any more,
Who see that miracle of stars. Behold.'

I signed above, where all the stars were out,
As if an urgent heat had started there
A secret writing from a sombre page,
A blank, last moment, crowded suddenly
With hurrying splendors.
'Then you do not know' —
He murmured.
'Yes, I know,' I said, 'I know.
I had the news from Vincent Carrington.
And yet I did not think you 'd leave the work
In England, for so much even, — though of course
You 'll make a work-day of your holiday,
And turn it to our Tuscan people's use, —
Who much need helping since the Austrian boar
(So bold to cross the Alp to Lombardy
And dash his brute front unabashed against
The steep snow-bosses of that shield of God
Who soon shall rise in wrath and shake it clear)
Came hither also, raking up our grape
And olive gardens with his tyrannous tusk,
And rolling on our maize with all his swine.'

'You had the news from Vincent Carrington,'
He echoed, — picking up the phrase beyond,
As if he knew the rest was merely talk
To fill a gap and keep out a strong wind;
'You had, then, Vincent's personal news ?'
'His own,'
I answered. 'All that ruined world of yours
Seems crumbling into marriage. Carrington
Has chosen wisely.'
'Do you take it so ?'
He cried, 'and is it possible at last' . . .
He paused there, — and then, inward to himself,
'Too much at last, too late ! — yet certainly' . . .
(And there his voice swayed as an Alpine plank
That feels a passionate torrent underneath)
'The knowledge, had I known it first or last,
Could scarce have changed the actual case for *me*.
And best for *her* at this time.'
Nay, I thought,

He loves Kate Ward, it seems, now, like a man,
Because he has married Lady Waldemar!
Ah, Vincent's letter said how Leigh was moved
To hear that Vincent was betrothed to Kate.
With what cracked pitchers go we to deep wells
In this world! Then I spoke, — 'I did not think,
My cousin, you had ever known Kate Ward.'

'In fact, I never knew her. 'T is enough
That Vincent did, and therefore chose his wife
For other reasons than those topaz eyes
We 've heard of. Not to undervalue them,
For all that. One takes up the world with eyes.'

— Including Romney Leigh, I thought again,
Albeit he knows them only by repute.
How vile must all men be since *he* 's a man.

His deep pathetic voice, as if he guessed
I did not surely love him, took the word;
'You never got a letter from Lord Howe
A month back, dear Aurora?'
'None,' I said.

'I felt it was so,' he replied: 'yet, strange!
Sir Blaise Delorme has passed through Florence?'
'Ay,
By chance I saw him in Our Lady's church
(I saw him, mark you, but he saw not me),
Clean-washed in holy water from the count
Of things terrestrial, — letters, and the rest;
He had crossed us out together with his sins.
Ay, strange; but only strange that good Lord Howe
Preferred him to the post because of pauls.
For me I 'm sworn to never trust a man —
At least with letters.'
'There were facts to tell,
To smooth with eye and accent. Howe supposed . . .
Well, well, no matter! there was dubious need;
You heard the news from Vincent Carrington.
And yet perhaps you had been startled less
To see me, dear Aurora, if you had read
That letter.'
— Now he sets me down as vexed.
I think I 've draped myself in woman's pride
To a perfect purpose. Oh, I 'm vexed, it seems!
My friend Lord Howe deputes his friend Sir Blaise
To break as softly as a sparrow's egg
That lets a bird out tenderly, the news
Of Romney's marriage to a certain saint;
To *smooth with eye and accent*, — indicate
His possible presence. Excellently well
You 've played your part, my Lady Waldemar, —
As I 've played mine.
'Dear Romney,' I began,
'You did not use, of old, to be so like
A Greek king coming from a taken Troy,
'T was needful that precursors spread your path
With three-piled carpets, to receive your foot
And dull the sound of 't. For myself, be sure,
Although it frankly grinds the gravel here,
I still can bear it. Yet I 'm sorry too
To lose this famous letter, which Sir Blaise
Has twisted to a lighter absently
To fire some holy taper: dear Lord Howe
Writes letters good for all things but to lose;
And many a flower of London gossipry
Has dropped wherever such a stem broke off.
Of course I feel that, lonely among my vines,
Where nothing 's talked of, save the blight again,
And no more Chianti! Still the letter 's use
As preparation . . . Did I start, indeed?
Last night I started at a cockchafer,
And shook a half-hour after. Have you learnt
No more of women, 'spite of privilege,
Than still to take account too seriously
Of such weak flutterings? Why, we like it, sir,

We get our powers and our effects that way:
The trees stand stiff and still at time of frost,
If no wind tears them; but, let summer come,
When trees are happy, — and a breath avails
To set them trembling through a million leaves
In luxury of emotion. Something less
It takes to move a woman: let her start
And shake at pleasure, — nor conclude at yours,
The winter 's bitter, — but the summer 's green.'

He answered: 'Be the summer ever green
With you, Aurora! — though you sweep your sex
With somewhat bitter gusts from where you live
Above them, — whirling downward from your heights
Your very own pine-cones, in a grand disdain
Of the lowland burrs with which you scatter them.
So high and cold to others and yourself,
A little less to Romney were unjust,
And thus, I would not have you. Let it pass:
I feel content so. You can bear indeed
My sudden step beside you: but for me,
'T would move me sore to hear your softened voice, —
Aurora's voice, — if softened unaware
In pity of what I am.'
Ah friend, I thought,
As husband of the Lady Waldemar
You 're granted very sorely pitiable!
And yet Aurora Leigh must guard her voice
From softening in the pity of your case,
As if from lie or license. Certainly
We 'll soak up all the slush and soil of life
With softened voices, ere we come to *you*.

At which I interrupted my own thought
And spoke out calmly, 'Let us ponder, friend,
Whate'er our state we must have made it first;
And though the thing displease us, ay, perhaps
Displease us warrantably, never doubt
That other states, thought possible once, and then
Rejected by the instinct of our lives,
If then adopted had displeased us more
Than this in which the choice, the will, the love,
Has stamped the honor of a patent act
From henceforth. What we choose may not be good,
But, that we choose it, proves it good for *us*
Potentially, fantastically, now
Or last year, rather than a thing we saw,
And saw no need for choosing. Moths will burn
Their wings, — which proves that light is good for moths,
Who else had flown not where they agonize.'

'Ay, light is good,' he echoed, and there paused;
And then abruptly, . . . 'Marian. Marian 's well?'

I bowed my head but found no word. 'T was hard
To speak of *her* to Lady Waldemar's
New husband. How much did he know, at last?
How much! how little! — He would take no sign,
But straight repeated, — 'Marian. Is she well?'

'She 's well,' I answered.
She was there in sight
An hour back, but the night had drawn her home,
Where still I heard her in an upper room,
Her low voice singing to the child in bed,
Who, restless with the summer-heat and play
And slumber snatched at noon, was long sometimes
In falling off, and took a score of songs
And mother-hushes ere she saw him sound.

'She 's well,' I answered.
'Here?' he asked.
'Yes, here.'

He stopped and sighed. 'That shall be presently,
But now this must be. I have words to say,

And would be alone to say them, I with you,
And no third troubling.’
‘Speak then,’ I returned,
‘She will not vex you.’
At which, suddenly
He turned his face upon me with its smile
As if to crush me. ‘I have read your book,
Aurora.’
‘You have read it,’ I replied,
‘And I have writ it, — we have done with it.
And now the rest?’
‘The rest is like the first,’
He answered, — ‘for the book is in my heart,
Lives in me, wakes in me, and dreams in me:
My daily bread tastes of it, — and my wine
Which has no smack of it, I pour it out,
It seems unnatural drinking.’
Bitterly
I took the word up; ‘Never waste your wine.
The book lived in me ere it lived in you;
I know it closer than another does,
And how it ’s foolish, feeble, and afraid,
And all unworthy so much compliment.
Beseech you, keep your wine, — and, when you drink,
Still wish some happier fortune to a friend,
Than even to have written a far better book.’

He answered gently, ‘That is consequent:
The poet looks beyond the book he has made,
Or else he had not made it. If a man
Could make a man, he ’d henceforth be a god
In feeling what a little thing is man:
It is not my case. And this special book,
I did not make it, to make light of it:
It stands above my knowledge, draws me up;
’T is high to me. It may be that the book
Is not so high, but I so low, instead;
Still high to me. I mean no compliment:
I will not say there are not, young or old,
Male writers, ay, or female, let it pass,
Who ’ll write us richer and completer books.
A man may love a woman perfectly,
And yet by no means ignorantly maintain
A thousand women have not larger eyes:
Enough that she alone has looked at him
With eyes that, large or small, have won his soul.
And so, this book, Aurora, — so, your book.’

‘Alas,’ I answered, ‘is it so, indeed?’
And then was silent.
‘Is it so, indeed,’
He echoed, ‘that *alas* is all your word?’
I said, ‘I ’m thinking of a far-off June,
When you and I, upon my birthday once,
Discoursed of life and art, with both untried.
I ’m thinking, Romney, how ’t was morning then,
And now ’t is night.’
‘And now,’ he said, ‘’t is night.’

‘I ’m thinking,’ I resumed, ‘’t is somewhat sad,
That if I had known, that morning in the dew,
My cousin Romney would have said such words
On such a night at close of many years,
In speaking of a future book of mine
It would have pleased me better as a hope,
Than as an actual grace it can at all:
That ’s sad, I ’m thinking.’
‘Ay,’ he said, ‘’t is night.’

‘And there,’ I added lightly, ‘are the stars!
And here, we ’ll talk of stars and not of books.’
‘You have the stars,’ he murmured, — ‘it is well:
Be like them! shine, Aurora, on my dark,
Though high and cold and only like a star,
And for this short night only, — you, who keep
The same Aurora of the bright June day
That withered up the flowers before my face,
And turned me from the garden evermore
Because I was not worthy. Oh, deserved,
Deserved! that I, who verily had not learnt
God’s lesson half, attaining as a dunce

To obliterate good words with fractious thumbs
And cheat myself of the context, —*I* should push
Aside, with male ferocious impudence,
The world's Aurora who had conned her part
On the other side the leaf! ignore her so,
Because she was a woman and a queen,
And had no beard to bristle through her song,
My teacher, who has taught me with a book,
My Miriam whose sweet mouth, when nearly drowned
I still heard singing on the shore! Deserved,
That here I should look up unto the stars
And miss the glory' . . .
'Can I understand?'
I broke in. 'You speak wildly, Romney Leigh,
Or I hear wildly. In that morning-time
We recollect, the roses were too red,
The trees too green, reproach too natural
If one should see not what the other saw:
And now, it 's night, remember; we have shades
In place of colors; we are now grown cold,
And old, my cousin Romney. Pardon me, —
I 'm very happy that you like my book,
And very sorry that I quoted back
A ten years' birthday. 'T was so mad a thing
In any woman, I scarce marvel much
You took it for a venturous piece of spite,
Provoking such excuses as indeed
I cannot call you slack in.'
'Understand,'
He answered sadly, 'something, if but so.
This night is softer than an English day,
And men may well come hither when they 're sick,
To draw in easier breath from larger air.
'T is thus with me; I come to you, — to you
My Italy of women, just to breathe
My soul out once before you, ere I go,
As humble as God makes me at the last
(I thank Him), quite out of the way of men
And yours, Aurora, — like a punished child,
His cheeks all blurred with tears and naughtiness,
To silence in a corner. I am come
To speak, beloved' . . .
'Wisely, cousin Leigh,
And worthily of us both!'
'Yes, worthily,
For this time I must speak out and confess
That I, so truculent in assumption once,
So absolute in dogma, proud in aim,
And fierce in expectation, — I, who felt
The whole world tugging at my skirts for help,
As if no other man than I could pull,
Nor woman but I led her by the hand,
Nor cloth hold but I had it in my coat,
Do know myself to-night for what I was
On that June day, Aurora. Poor bright day,
Which meant the best . . . a woman and a rose,
And which I smote upon the cheek with words
Until it turned and rent me! Young you were,
That birthday, poet, but you talked the right:
While I, . . . I built up follies like a wall
To intercept the sunshine and your face.
Your face! that 's worse.'
'Speak wisely, cousin Leigh.'

'Yes, wisely, dear Aurora, though too late:
But then, not wisely. I was heavy then,
And stupid, and distracted with the cries
Of tortured prisoners in the polished brass
Of that Phalarian bull, society,
Which seems to bellow bravely like ten bulls,
But, if you listen, moans and cries instead
Despairingly, like victims tossed and gored
And trampled by their hoofs. I heard the cries
Too close: I could not hear the angels lift
A fold of rustling air, nor what they said
To help my pity. I beheld the world
As one great famishing carnivorous mouth, —
A huge, deserted, callow, blind bird Thing,
With piteous open beak that hurt my heart,
Till down upon the filthy ground I dropped,
And tore the violets up to get the worms.

Worms, worms, was all my cry: an open mouth, 401
A gross want, bread to fill it to the lips,
No more. That poor men narrowed their demands
To such an end, was virtue, I supposed,
Adjudicating that to see it so
Was reason. Oh, I did not push the case
Up higher, and ponder how it answers when
The rich take up the same cry for themselves,
Professing equally, — "An open mouth,
A gross need, food to fill us, and no more."
Why that 's so far from virtue, only vice 411
Can find excuse for 't! that makes libertines,
And slurs our cruel streets from end to end
With eighty thousand women in one smile,
Who only smile at night beneath the gas.
The body's satisfaction and no more,
Is used for argument against the soul's,
Here too; the want, here too, implies the right.
— How dark I stood that morning in the sun,
My best Aurora (though I saw your eyes),
When first you told me . . . oh, I recollect 421
The sound, and how you lifted your small hand,
And how your white dress and your burnished curls
Went greatening round you in the still blue air,
As if an inspiration from within
Had blown them all out when you spoke the words,
Even these, — "You will not compass your poor ends
Of barley-feeding and material ease,
Without the poet's individualism
To work your universal. It takes a soul
To move a body, — it takes a high-souled man 431
To move the masses, even to a cleaner stye:
It takes the ideal, to blow an inch inside
The dust of the actual: and your Fouriers failed,
Because not poets enough to understand
That life develops from within." I say
Your words, — I could say other words of yours,
For none of all your words will let me go;
Like sweet verbena which, being brushed against,
Will hold us three hours after by the smell
In spite of long walks upon windy hills. 441
But these words dealt in sharper perfume, — these
Were ever on me, stinging through my dreams,
And saying themselves for ever o'er my acts
Like some unhappy verdict. That I failed,
Is certain. Stye or no stye, to contrive
The swine's propulsion toward the precipice,
Proved easy and plain. I subtly organized
And ordered, built the cards up high and higher,
Till, some one breathing, all fell flat again;
In setting right society's wide wrong, 451
Mere life 's so fatal. So I failed indeed
Once, twice, and oftener, — hearing through the rents
Of obstinate purpose, still those words of yours,
"*You will not compass your poor ends, not you!*"
But harder than you said them; every time
Still farther from your voice, until they came
To overcrow me with triumphant scorn
Which vexed me to resistance. Set down this
For condemnation, — I was guilty here; 460
I stood upon my deed and fought my doubt,
As men will, — for I doubted, — till at last
My deed gave way beneath me suddenly
And left me what I am: — the curtain dropped,
My part quite ended, all the footlights quenched,
My own soul hissing at me through the dark,
I ready for confession, — I was wrong,
I 've sorely failed, I 've slipped the ends of life, 468
I yield, you have conquered.'
'Stay,' I answered him;
'I 've something for your hearing, also. I
Have failed too.'
'You!' he said, 'you 're very great;
The sadness of your greatness fits you well:
As if the plume upon a hero 's casque
Should nod a shadow upon his victor face.'

I took him up austerely, — 'You have read
My book, but not my heart; for recollect,

'T is writ in Sanscrit, which you bungle at.
I 've surely failed, I know, if failure means
To look back sadly on work gladly done, —
To wander on my Mountains of Delight,
So called (I can remember a friend's words
As well as you, sir), weary and in want
Of even a sheep-path, thinking bitterly . . .
Well, well! no matter. I but say so much,
To keep you, Romney Leigh, from saying more,
And let you feel I am not so high indeed,
That I can bear to have you at my foot, —
Or safe, that I can help you. That June day,
Too deeply sunk in craterous sunsets now
For you or me to dig it up alive, —
To pluck it out all bleeding with spent flame
At the roots, before those moralizing stars
We have got instead, — that poor lost day, you said
Some words as truthful as the thing of mine
You cared to keep in memory; and I hold
If I, that day, and being the girl I was,
Had shown a gentler spirit, less arrogance,
It had not hurt me. You will scarce mistake
The point here: I but only think, you see,
More justly, that 's more humbly, of myself,
Than when I tried a crown on and supposed . . .
Nay, laugh, sir, — I 'll laugh with you! — pray you, laugh,
I 've had so many birthdays since that day
I 've learnt to prize mirth's opportunities,
Which come too seldom. Was it you who said
I was not changed? the same Aurora? Ah,
We could laugh there, too! Why, Ulysses' dog
Knew *him*, and wagged his tail and died: but if
I had owned a dog, I too, before my Troy,
And if you brought him here, . . . I warrant you
He 'd look into my face, bark lustily,
And live on stoutly, as the creatures will
Whose spirits are not troubled by long loves.
A dog would never know me, I'm so changed,
Much less a friend . . . except that you 're misled
By the color of the hair, the trick of the voice,
Like that Aurora Leigh's.'
'Sweet trick of voice!
I would be a dog for this, to know it at last,
And die upon the falls of it. O love,
O best Aurora! are you then so sad
You scarcely had been sadder as my wife?'

'Your wife, sir! I must certainly be changed,
If I, Aurora, can have said a thing
So light, it catches at the knightly spurs
Of a noble gentleman like Romney Leigh,
And trips him from his honorable sense
Of what befits' . . .
'You wholly misconceive,'
He answered.
I returned, — 'I 'm glad of it.
But keep from misconception, too, yourself:
I am not humbled to so low a point,
Not so far saddened. If I am sad at all,
Ten layers of birthdays on a woman's head
Are apt to fossilize her girlish mirth,
Though ne'er so merry: I 'm perforce more wise,
And that, in truth, means sadder. For the rest,
Look here, sir: I was right upon the whole
That birthday morning. 'T is impossible
To get at men excepting through their souls,
However open their carnivorous jaws;
And poets get directlier at the soul
Than any of your œconomists — for which
You must not overlook the poet's work
When scheming for the world's necessities.
The soul 's the way. Not even Christ Himself
Can save man else than as He holds man's soul;
And therefore did He come into our flesh,
As some wise hunter creeping on his knees,
With a torch, into the blackness of a cave,
To face and quell the beast there — take the soul,
And so possess the whole man, body and soul.
I said, so far, right, yes: not farther, though:
We both were wrong that June day — both as wrong

As an east wind had been. I who talked of art,
And you who grieved for all men's griefs . . . what then?
We surely made too small a part for God
In these things. What we are, imports us more
Than what we eat; and life, you 've granted me,
Develops from within. But innermost
Of the inmost, most interior of the interne,
God claims his own, Divine humanity
Renewing nature, or the piercingest verse
Pressed in by subtlest poet, still must keep
As much upon the outside of a man
As the very bowl in which he dips his beard.
— And then, . . . the rest; I cannot surely speak:
Perhaps I doubt more than you doubted then,
If I the poet's veritable charge
Have borne upon my forehead. If I have,
It might feel somewhat liker to a crown,
The foolish green one even. — Ah, I think,
And chiefly when the sun shines, that I 've failed.
But what then, Romney? Though we fail indeed,
You . . . I . . . a score of such weak workers, . . . He
Fails never. If He cannot work by us,
He will work over us. Does He want a man,
Much less a woman, think you? Every time
The star winks there, so many souls are born,
Who all shall work too. Let our own be calm:
We should be ashamed to sit beneath those stars,
Impatient that we 're nothing.'
'Could we sit
Just so for ever, sweetest friend,' he said,
'My failure would seem better than success.
And yet indeed your book has dealt with me
More gently, cousin, than you ever will!
Your book brought down entire the bright June day,
And set me wandering in the garden-walks,
And let me watch the garland in a place
You blushed so . . . nay, forgive me, do not stir, —
I only thank the book for what it taught,
And what permitted. Poet, doubt yourself,
But never doubt that you 're a poet to me
From henceforth. You have written poems, sweet,
Which moved me in secret, as the sap is moved
In still March-branches, signless as a stone:
But this last book o'ercame me like soft rain
Which falls at midnight, when the tightened bark
Breaks out into unhesitating buds
And sudden protestations of the spring.
In all your other books, I saw but *you*:
A man may see the moon so, in a pond,
And not be nearer therefore to the moon,
Nor use the sight . . . except to drown himself:
And so I forced my heart back from the sight,
For what had *I*, I thought, to do with *her*,
Aurora . . . Romney? But, in this last book,
You showed me something separate from yourself,
Beyond you, and I bore to take it in
And let it draw me. You have shown me truths,
O June-day friend, that help me now at night,
When June is over! truths not yours, indeed,
But set within my reach by means of you,
Presented by your voice and verse the way
To take them clearest. Verily I was wrong;
And verily many thinkers of this age,
Ay, many Christian teachers, half in heaven,
Are wrong in just my sense who understood
Our natural world too insularly, as if
No spiritual counterpart completed it,
Consummating its meaning, rounding all
To justice and perfection, line by line,
Form by form, nothing single nor alone,
The great below clenched by the great above,
Shade here authenticating substance there,
The body proving spirit, as the effect

The cause: we meantime being too grossly apt
To hold the natural, as dogs a bone
(Though reason and nature beat us in the face),
So obstinately, that we 'll break our teeth
Or ever we let go. For everywhere
We 're too materialistic, — eating clay
(Like men of the west) instead of Adam's corn
And Noah's wine — clay by handfuls, clay by lumps,
Until we 're filled up to the throat with clay,
And grow the grimy color of the ground
On which we are feeding. Ay, materialist
The age's name is. God Himself, with some,
Is apprehended as the bare result
Of what his hand materially has made,
Expressed in such an algebraic sign
Called God — that is, to put it otherwise,
They add up nature to a nought of God
And cross the quotient. There are many even,
Whose names are written in the Christian Church
To no dishonor, diet still on mud
And splash the altars with it. You might think
The clay Christ laid upon their eyelids when,
Still blind, He called them to the use of sight,
Remained there to retard its exercise
With clogging incrustations. Close to heaven,
They see for mysteries, through the open doors,
Vague puffs of smoke from pots of earthenware,
And fain would enter, when their time shall come,
With quite another body than Saint Paul
Has promised — husk and chaff, the whole barley-corn
Or where 's the resurrection?'
'Thus it is,'
I sighed. And he resumed with mournful face,
'Beginning so, and filling up with clay
The wards of this great key, the natural world,
And fumbling vainly therefore at the lock
Of the spiritual, we feel ourselves shut in
With all the wild-beast roar of struggling life,
The terrors and compunctions of our souls,
As saints with lions, — we who are not saints,
And have no heavenly lordship in our stare
To awe them backward. Ay, we are forced, so pent,
To judge the whole too partially, . . . confound
Conclusions. Is there any common phrase
Significant, with the adverb heard alone,
The verb being absent, and the pronoun out?
But we, distracted in the roar of life,
Still insolently at God's adverb snatch,
And bruit against Him that his thought is void,
His meaning hopeless, — cry, that everywhere
The government is slipping from his hand,
Unless some other Christ (say Romney Leigh)
Come up and toil and moil and change the world,
Because the First has proved inadequate,
However we talk bigly of his work
And piously of his person. We blaspheme
At last, to finish our doxology,
Despairing on the earth for which He died.'

'So now,' I asked, 'you have more hope of men?'

'I hope,' he answered. 'I am come to think
That God will have his work done, as you said,
And that we need not be disturbed too much
For Romney Leigh or others having failed
With this or that quack nostrum — recipes
For keeping summits by annulling depths,
For wrestling with luxurious lounging sleeves,
And acting heroism without a scratch,
We fail, — what then? Aurora, if I smiled
To see you, in your lovely morning-pride,
Try on the poet's wreath which suits the noon
(Sweet cousin, walls must get the weather stain
Before they grow the ivy!), certainly
I stood myself there worthier of contempt,

Self-rated, in disastrous arrogance,
As competent to sorrow for mankind,
And even their odds. A man may well despair
Who counts himself so needful to success.
I failed: I throw the remedy back on God,
And sit down here beside you, in good hope.'

'And yet take heed,' I answered, 'lest we lean
Too dangerously on the other side,
And so fail twice. Be sure, no earnest work
Of any honest creature, howbeit weak,
Imperfect, ill-adapted, fails so much,
It is not gathered as a grain of sand
To enlarge the sum of human action used
For carrying out God's end. No creature works
So ill, observe, that therefore he 's cashiered.
The honest, earnest man must stand and work,
The woman also — otherwise she drops
At once below the dignity of man,
Accepting serfdom. Free men freely work.
Whoever fears God, fears to sit at ease.'

He cried: 'True. After Adam, work was curse:
The natural creature labors, sweats, and frets.
But, after Christ, work turns to privilege,
And henceforth, one with our humanity,
The Six-day Worker working still in us
Has called us freely to work on with Him
In high companionship. So, happiest!
I count that heaven itself is only work
To a surer issue. Let us work, indeed,
But no more work as Adam, — nor as Leigh
Erewhile, as if the only man on earth,
Responsible for all the thistles blown
And tigers couchant, struggling in amaze
Against disease and winter, snarling on
For ever that the world 's not paradise.
O cousin, let us be content, in work,
To do the thing we can, and not presume
To fret because it 's little. 'T will employ
Seven men, they say, to make a perfect pin:
Who makes the head, content to miss the point;
Who makes the point, agreed to leave the join:
And if a man should cry "I want a pin,
And I must make it straightway, head and point,"
His wisdom is not worth the pin he wants.
Seven men to a pin, — and not a man too much!
Seven generations, haply, to this world,
To right it visibly a finger's breadth,
And mend its rents a little. Oh, to storm
And say "This world here is intolerable;
I will not eat this corn, nor drink this wine,
Nor love this woman, flinging her my soul
Without a bond for 't as a lover should,
Nor use the generous leave of happiness
As not too good for using generously" —
(Since virtue kindles at the touch of joy
Like a man's cheek laid on a woman's hand,
And God, Who knows it, looks for quick returns
From joys) — to stand and claim to have a life
Beyond the bounds of the individual man,
And raze all personal cloisters of the soul
To build up public stores and magazines,
As if God's creatures otherwise were lost,
The builder surely saved by any means!
To think, — I have a pattern on my nail,
And I will carve the world new after it
And solve so these hard social questions — nay,
Impossible social questions, since their roots
Strike deep in Evil's own existence here,
Which God permits because the question 's hard
To abolish evil nor attaint free-will.
Ay, hard to God, but not to Romney Leigh!
For Romney has a pattern on his nail
(Whatever may be lacking on the Mount),
And, not being over-nice to separate
What 's element from what 's convention, hastes
By line on line to draw you out a world,
Without your help indeed, unless you take
His yoke upon you, and will learn of him,
So much he has to teach! so good a world!
The same the whole creation 's groaning for!
No rich nor poor, no gain nor loss nor stint;
No pottage in it able to exclude
A brother's birthright, and no right of birth

The pottage — both secured to every man,
And perfect virtue dealt out like the rest
Gratuitously, with the soup at six,
To whoso does not seek it.'
'Softly, sir,'
I interrupted, — 'I had a cousin once
I held in reverence. If he strained too wide,
It was not to take honor, but give help;
The gesture was heroic. If his hand
Accomplished nothing . . . (well, it is not proved)
That empty hand thrown impotently out
Were sooner caught, I think, by One in heaven,
Than many a hand that reaped a harvest in,
And keeps the scythe's glow on it. Pray you, then,
For my sake merely, use less bitterness
In speaking of my cousin.'
'Ah,' he said,
'Aurora! when the prophet beats the ass,
The angel intercedes.' He shook his head —
'And yet to mean so well and fail so foul,
Expresses ne'er another beast than man;
The antithesis is human. Hearken, dear;
There's too much abstract willing, purposing,
In this poor world. We talk by aggregates,
And think by systems, and, being used to face
Our evils in statistics, are inclined
To cap them with unreal remedies
Drawn out in haste on the other side the slate.'
'That's true,' I answered, fain to throw up thought
And make a game of't. 'Yes, we generalize
Enough to please you. If we pray at all,
We pray no longer for our daily bread,
But next centenary's harvests. If we give,
Our cup of water is not tendered till
We lay down pipes and found a Company
With Branches. Ass or angel, 't is the same:
A woman cannot do the thing she ought,
Which means whatever perfect thing she can,
In life, in art, in science, but she fears
To let the perfect action take her part,
And rest there: she must prove what she can do
Before she does it, prate of woman's rights,
Of woman's mission, woman's function, till
The men (who are prating too on their side) cry,
"A woman's function plainly is . . . to talk."
Poor souls, they are very reasonably vexed;
They cannot hear each other talk.'
'And you,
An artist, judge so?'
'I, an artist — yes:
Because, precisely, I'm an artist, sir,
And woman, if another sat in sight,
I'd whisper, — Soft, my sister! not a word!
By speaking we prove only we can speak,
Which he, the man here, never doubted. What
He doubts is, whether we can *do* the thing
With decent grace we've not yet done at all.
Now, do it; bring your statue, — you have room!
He'll see it even by the starlight here;
And if 't is e'er so little like the god
Who looks out from the marble silently
Along the track of his own shining dart
Through the dusk of ages, there's no need to speak;
The universe shall henceforth speak for you,
And witness, "She who did this thing was born
To do it — claims her license in her work."
And so with more works. Whoso cures the plague,
Though twice a woman, shall be called a leech:
Who rights a land's finances is excused
For touching coppers, though her hands be white.
But we, we talk!'
'It is the age's mood,'
He said; 'we boast, and do not. We put up
Hostelry signs where'er we lodge a day, —
Some red colossal cow with mighty paps
A Cyclops' fingers could not strain to milk, —
Then bring out presently our saucerful
Of curds. We want more quiet in our works,
More knowledge of the bounds in which we work;
More knowledge that each individual man
Remains an Adam to the general race,
Constrained to see, like Adam, that he keep

His personal state's condition honestly,
Or vain all thoughts of his to help the world,
Which still must be developed from its *one*
If bettered in its many. We indeed,
Who think to lay it out new like a park,
We take a work on us which is not man's,
For God alone sits far enough above
To speculate so largely. None of us
(Not Romney Leigh) is mad enough to say,
We 'll have a grove of oaks upon that slope
And sink the need of acorns. Government,
If veritable and lawful, is not given
By imposition of the foreign hand,
Nor chosen from a pretty pattern-book
Of some domestic idealogue who sits
And coldly chooses empire, where as well
He might republic. Genuine government
Is but the expression of a nation, good
Or less good — even as all society,
Howe'er unequal, monstrous, crazed and cursed,
Is but the expression of men's single lives,
The loud sum of the silent units. What,
We 'd change the aggregate and yet retain
Each separate figure? whom do we cheat by that?
Now, not even Romney.'
'Cousin, you are sad.
Did all your social labor at Leigh Hall,
And elsewhere, come to nought, then?'
'It *was* nought,'
He answered mildly. 'There is room, indeed,
For statues still in this large world of God's,
But not for vacuums; so I am not sad —
Not sadder than is good for what I am.
My vain phalanstery dissolved itself;
My men and women of disordered lives
I brought in orderly to dine and sleep,
Broke up those waxen masks I made them wear,
With fierce contortions of the natural face,
And cursed me for my tyrannous constraint
In forcing crooked creatures to live straight;
And set the country hounds upon my back
To bite and tear me for my wicked deed
Of trying to do good without the church
Or ever the squires, Aurora. Do you mind
Your ancient neighbors? The great book-club teems
With "sketches," "summaries," and "last tracts" but twelve,
On socialistic troublers of close bonds
Betwixt the generous rich and grateful poor.
The vicar preached from "Revelations" (till
The doctor woke), and found me with "the frogs"
On three successive Sundays; ay, and stopped
To weep a little (for he 's getting old)
That such perdition should o'ertake a man
Of such fair acres — in the parish, too!
He printed his discourses "by request,"
And if your book shall sell as his did, then
Your verses are less good than I suppose.
The women of the neighborhood subscribed,
And sent me a copy, bound in scarlet silk,
Tooled edges, blazoned with the arms of Leigh:
I own that touched me.'
'What, the pretty ones?
Poor Romney!'
'Otherwise the effect was small:
I had my windows broken once or twice
By liberal peasants naturally incensed
At such a vexer of Arcadian peace,
Who would not let men call their wives their own
To kick like Britons, and made obstacles
When things went smoothly as a baby drugged,
Toward freedom and starvation — bringing down
The wicked London tavern-thieves and drabs
To affront the blessed hillside drabs and thieves
With mended morals, quotha — fine new lives! —
My windows paid for 't. I was shot at, once,
By an active poacher who had hit a hare
From the other barrel (tired of springeing game
So long upon my acres, undisturbed,
And restless for the country's virtue — yet
He missed me); ay, and pelted very oft
In riding through the village. "There he goes

Who 'd drive away our Christian gentlefolk,
To catch us undefended in the trap
He baits with poisonous cheese, and lock us up
In that pernicious prison of Leigh Hall
With all his murderers! Give another name
And say Leigh Hell, and burn it up with fire."
And so they did, at last, Aurora.'
'Did ?'

'You never heard it, cousin? Vincent's news
Came stinted, then.'
'They did? they burnt Leigh Hall?'

'You 're sorry, dear Aurora? Yes, indeed,
They did it perfectly: a thorough work,
And not a failure, this time. Let us grant
'T is somewhat easier, though, to burn a house
Than build a system; yet that 's easy too
In a dream. Books, pictures — ay, the pictures! What,
You think your dear Vandykes would give them pause?
Our proud ancestral Leighs, with those peaked beards,
Or bosoms white as foam thrown up on rocks
From the old-spent wave. Such calm defiant looks
They flared up with! now nevermore to twit
The bones in the family vault with ugly death.
Not one was rescued, save the Lady Maud,
Who threw you down, that morning you were born,
The undeniable lineal mouth and chin
To wear for ever for her gracious sake,
For which good deed I saved her; the rest went:
And you, you 're sorry, cousin. Well, for me,
With all my phalansterians safely out
Poor hearts, they helped the burners, it was said,
And certainly a few clapped hands and yelled),
The ruin did not hurt me as it might —
As when for instance I was hurt one day
A certain letter being destroyed. In fact,
To see the great house flare so . . . oaken floors
Our fathers made so fine with rushes once
Before our mothers furbished them with trains,
Carved wainscots, panelled walls, the favorite slide
For draining off a martyr (or a rogue),
The echoing galleries, half a half-mile long,
And all the various stairs that took you up
And took you down, and took you round about
Upon their slippery darkness, recollect,
All helping to keep up one blazing jest!
The flames through all the casements pushing forth,
Like red-hot devils crinkled into snakes,
All signifying "Look you, Romney Leigh,
We save the people from your saving, here,
Yet so as by fire! we make a pretty show
Besides — and that 's the best you 've ever done."
— To see this, almost moved myself to clap!
The "vale et plaude" came too with effect
When in the roof fell, and the fire that paused,
Stunned momently beneath the stroke of slates
And tumbling rafters, rose at once and roared,
And wrapping the whole house (which disappeared
In a mounting whirlwind of dilated flame),
Blew upward, straight, its drift of fiery chaff
In the face of Heaven, which blenched, and ran up higher.'

'Poor Romney!'
'Sometimes when I dream,' he said,
'I hear the silence after, 't was so still.
For all those wild beasts, yelling, cursing round,
Were suddenly silent, while you counted five,
So silent, that you heard a young bird fall
From the top nest in the neighboring rookery,
Through edging over-rashly toward the light.
The old rooks had already fled too far

To hear the screech they fled with, though you saw
Some flying still, like scatterings of dead leaves
In autumn-gusts, seen dark against the sky, —
All flying, — ousted, like the House of Leigh.'

'Dear Romney!'
'Evidently 't would have been
A fine sight for a poet, sweet, like you,
To make the verse blaze after. I myself,
Even I, felt something in the grand old trees,
Which stood that moment like brute Druid gods
Amazed upon the rim of ruin, where,
As into a blackened socket, the great fire
Had dropped, still throwing up splinters now and then
To show them gray with all their centuries,
Left there to witness that on such a day
The House went out.'
'Ah!'
'While you counted five,
I seemed to feel a little like a Leigh, —
But then it passed, Aurora. A child cried,
And I had enough to think of what to do
With all those houseless wretches in the dark,
And ponder where they 'd dance the next time, they
Who had burnt the viol.'
'Did you think of that?
Who burns his viol will not dance, I know,
To cymbals, Romney.'
'O my sweet, sad voice!'
He cried, — 'O voice that speaks and overcomes!
The sun is silent, but Aurora speaks.'

'Alas,' I said, 'I speak I know not what:
I 'm back in childhood, thinking as a child,
A foolish fancy — will it make you smile?
I shall not from the window of my room
Catch sight of those old chimneys any more.'

'No more,' he answered. 'If you pushed one day
Through all the green hills to our fathers' house,
You 'd come upon a great charred circle, where
The patient earth was singed an acre round;
With one stone stair, symbolic of my life,
Ascending, winding, leading up to nought!
'T is worth a poet's seeing. Will you go?'

I made no answer. Had I any right
To weep with this man, that I dared to speak?
A woman stood between his soul and mine,
And waved us off from touching evermore,
With those unclean white hands of hers. Enough.
We had burnt our viols, and were silent. So,
The silence lengthened till it pressed. I spoke,
To breathe: 'I think you were ill afterward.'

'More ill,' he answered, 'had been scarcely ill.
I hoped this feeble fumbling at life's knot
Might end concisely, — but I failed to die,
As formerly I failed to live, — and thus
Grew willing, having tried all other ways,
To try just God's. Humility 's so good,
When pride 's impossible. Mark us, how we make
Our virtues, cousin, from our worn-out sins,
Which smack of them from henceforth. Is it right,
For instance, to wed here while you love there?
And yet because a man sins once, the sin
Cleaves to him, in necessity to sin,
That if he sin not *so* to damn himself,
He sins *so*, to damn others with himself:
And thus, to wed here, loving there, becomes
A duty. Virtue buds a dubious leaf
Round mortal brows; your ivy 's better, dear.
— Yet she, 't is certain, is my very wife,
The very lamb left mangled by the wolves
Through my own bad shepherding: and could I choose
But take her on my shoulder past this stretch
Of rough, uneasy wilderness, poor lamb,
Poor child, poor child? — Aurora, my beloved,

I will not vex you any more to-night,
But, having spoken what I came to say,
The rest shall please you. What she can, in me —
Protection, tender liking, freedom, ease —
She shall have surely, liberally, for her
And hers, Aurora. Small amends they ’ll make
For hideous evils which she had not known
Except by me, and for this imminent loss,
This forfeit presence of a gracious friend,
Which also she must forfeit for my sake,
Since, . . . drop your hand in mine a moment, sweet,
We ’re parting ! — Ah, my snowdrop, what a touch,
As if the wind had swept it off ! You grudge
Your gelid sweetness on my palm but so,
A moment ? Angry, that I could not bear
You . . . speaking, breathing, living, side by side
With some one called my wife . . . and live, myself ?
Nay, be not cruel — you must understand !
Your lightest footfall on a floor of mine
Would shake the house, my lintel being uncrossed
’Gainst angels: henceforth it is night with me,
And so, henceforth, I put the shutters up:
Auroras must not come to spoil my dark.’

He smiled so feebly, with an empty hand
Stretched sideway from me — as indeed he looked
To any one but me to give him help;
And, while the moon came suddenly out full,
The double-rose of our Italian moons,
Sufficient plainly for the heaven and earth
(The stars struck dumb and washed away in dews
Of golden glory, and the mountains steeped
In divine languor), he, the man, appeared
So pale and patient, like the marble man
A sculptor puts his personal sadness in
To join his grandeur of ideal thought,
As if his mallet struck me from my height
Of passionate indignation, I who had risen
Pale, doubting paused . . . Was Romney mad indeed ?
Had all this wrong of heart made sick the brain ?
Then quiet, with a sort of tremulous pride,
‘Go, cousin,’ I said coldly; ‘a farewell
Was sooner spoken ’twixt a pair of friends
In those old days, than seems to suit you now.
Howbeit, since then, I ’ve writ a book or two,
I ’m somewhat dull still in the manly art
Of phrase and metaphrase. Why, any man
Can carve a score of white Loves out of snow,
As Buonarroti in my Florence there,
And set them on the wall in some safe shade,
As safe, sir, as your marriage ! very good;
Though if a woman took one from the ledge
To put it on the table by her flowers
And let it mind her of a certain friend,
’T would drop at once (so better), would not bear
Her nail-mark even, where she took it up
A little tenderly, — so best, I say:
For me, I would not touch the fragile thing
And risk to spoil it half an hour before
The sun shall shine to melt it: leave it there.
I ’m plain at speech, direct in purpose: when
I speak, you ’ll take the meaning as it is,
And not allow for puckerings in the silk
By clever stitches. I ’m a woman, sir —
I use the woman’s figures naturally,
As you the male license. So, I wish you well.
I ’m simply sorry for the griefs you ’ve had,
And not for your sake only, but mankind’s.
This race is never grateful: from the first,
One fills their cup at supper with pure wine,
Which back they give at cross-time on a sponge,
In vinegar and gall.’
‘If gratefuller,’
He murmured, ‘by so much less pitiable !
God’s self would never have come down to die,
Could man have thanked Him for it.’
‘Happily
’T is patent that, whatever,’ I resumed,
‘You suffered from this thanklessness of men,
You sink no more than Moses’ bulrush-boat
When once relieved of Moses, — for you ’re light,
You ’re light, my cousin ! which is well for you.

And manly. For myself, now mark me, sir,
They burnt Leigh Hall; but if, consummated
To devils, heightened beyond Lucifers,
They had burnt, instead, a star or two of those
We saw above there just a moment back,
Before the moon abolished them, — destroyed
And riddled them in ashes through a sieve
On the head of the foundering universe — what then ?
If you and I remained still you and I,
It could not shift our places as mere friends,
Nor render decent you should toss a phrase
Beyond the point of actual feeling ! Nay,
You shall not interrupt me: as you said,
We 're parting. Certainly, not once nor twice
To-night you 've mocked me somewhat, or yourself,
And I, at least, have not deserved it so
That I should meet it unsurprised. But now,
Enough: we 're parting . . . parting. Cousin Leigh,
I wish you well through all the acts of life
And life's relations, wedlock not the least,
And it shall "please me," in your words, to know
You yield your wife protection, freedom, ease,
And very tender liking. May you live
So happy with her, Romney, that your friends
Shall praise her for it ! Meantime some of us
Are wholly dull in keeping ignorant
Of what she has suffered by you, and what debt
Of sorrow your rich love sits down to pay:
But if 't is sweet for love to pay its debt,
'T is sweeter still for love to give its gift,
And you, be liberal in the sweeter way,
You can, I think. At least, as touches me,
You owe her, cousin Romney, no amends:
She is not used to hold my gown so fast,
You need entreat her now to let it go;
The lady never was a friend of mine,
Nor capable — I thought you knew as much —
Of losing for your sake so poor a prize
As such a worthless friendship. Be content,
Good cousin, therefore, both for her and you !
I 'll never spoil your dark, nor dull your noon,
Nor vex you when you 're merry, or at rest:
You shall not need to put a shutter up
To keep out this Aurora, — though your north
Can make Auroras which vex nobody,
Scarce known from night, I fancied ! let me add,
My larks fly higher than some windows. Well,
You 've read your Leighs. Indeed, 't would shake a house,
If such as I came in with outstretched hand,
Still warm and thrilling from the clasp of one . . .
Of one we know, . . . to acknowledge, palm to palm,
As mistress there, the Lady Waldemar.'
'Now God be with us' . . . with a sudden clash
Of voice he interrupted. 'What name 's that ?
You spoke a name, Aurora.'
'Pardon me;
I would that, Romney, I could name your wife
Nor wound you, yet be worthy.'
'Are we mad ?'
He echoed. 'Wife ! mine ! Lady Waldemar !
I think you said my wife.' He sprang to his feet,
And threw his noble head back toward the moon
As one who swims against a stormy sea,
Then laughed with such a helpless, hopeless scorn,
I stood and trembled.
'May God judge me so,'
He said at last, — 'I came convicted here,
And humbled sorely if not enough. I came,
Because this woman from her crystal soul
Had shown me something which a man calls light:
Because too, formerly, I sinned by her
As then and ever since I have, by God,
Through arrogance of nature, — though I loved . . .
Whom best, I need not say, since that is writ
Too plainly in the book of my misdeeds:

And thus I came here to abase myself,
And fasten, kneeling, on her regent brows
A garland which I startled thence one day
Of her beautiful June-youth. But here again
I'm baffled, — fail in my abasement as
My aggrandizement: there's no room left for me
At any woman's foot who misconceives
My nature, purpose, possible actions. What!
Are you the Aurora who made large my dreams
To frame your greatness? you conceive so small?
You stand so less than woman through being more
And lose your natural instinct (like a beast)
Through intellectual culture? since indeed
I do not think that any common she
Would dare adopt such monstrous forgeries
For the legible life signature of such
As I, with all my blots — with all my blots!
At last, then, peerless cousin, we are peers —
At last we're even. Ay, you've left your height,
And here upon my level we take hands,
And here I reach you to forgive you, sweet,
And that's a fall, Aurora. Long ago
You seldom understood me, — but before,
I could not blame you. Then, you only seemed
So high above, you could not see below;
But now I breathe, — but now I pardon! — nay,
We're parting. Dearest, men have burnt my house,
Maligned my motives; but not one, I swear,
Has wronged my soul as this Aurora has
Who called the Lady Waldemar my wife.'

'Not married to her! yet you said' . . .
'Again?
Nay, read the lines' (he held a letter out)
'She sent you through me.'
By the moonlight there
I tore the meaning out with passionate haste
Much rather than I read it. Thus it ran.

NINTH BOOK

Even thus. I pause to write it out at length,
The letter of the Lady Waldemar.

'I prayed your cousin Leigh to take you this:
He says he'll do it. After years of love,
Or what is called so, when a woman frets
And fools upon one string of a man's name,
And fingers it for ever till it breaks, —
He may perhaps do for her such a thing,
And she accept it without detriment
Although she should not love him any more.
And I, who do not love him, nor love you,
Nor you, Aurora, — choose you shall repent
Your most ungracious letter and confess,
Constrained by his convictions (he's convinced),
You've wronged me foully. Are you made so ill,
You woman, to impute such ill to *me*?
We both had mothers, — lay in their bosom once.
And after all, I thank you, Aurora Leigh,
For proving to myself that there are things
I would not do — not for my life, nor him,
Though something I have somewhat overdone, —
For instance, when I went to see the gods
One morning on Olympus, with a step
That shook the thunder from a certain cloud,
Committing myself vilely. Could I think,
The Muse I pulled my heart out from my breast
To soften, had herself a sort of heart,
And loved my mortal? He at least loved her, —
I heard him say so: 't was my recompense,
When, watching at his bedside fourteen days,
He broke out ever like a flame at whiles
Between the heats of fever, — "Is it thou?
Breathe closer, sweetest mouth!" and when at last,
The fever gone, the wasted face extinct,
As if it irked him much to know me there,
He said "'T was kind, 't was good, 't was womanly,"

(And fifty praises to excuse no love);
"But was the picture safe he had ventured for?"
And then, half wandering, "I have loved her well,
Although she could not love me." — "Say, instead,"
I answered, "she does love you." — 'T was my turn
To rave: I would have married him so changed,
Although the world had jeered me properly
For taking up with Cupid at his worst,
The silver quiver worn off on his hair.
"No, no," he murmured; "no, she loves me not;
Aurora Leigh does better: bring her book
And read it softly, Lady Waldemar,
Until I thank your friendship more for that
Than even for harder service." So I read
Your book, Aurora, for an hour that day:
I kept its pauses, marked its emphasis;
My voice, impaled upon its hooks of rhyme,
Not once would writhe, nor quiver, nor revolt;
I read on calmly, — calmly shut it up,
Observing, "There 's some merit in the book;
And yet the merit in 't is thrown away,
As chances still with women if we write
Or write not: we want string to tie our flowers,
So drop them as we walk, which serves to show
The way we went. Good morning, Mister Leigh;
You 'll find another reader the next time.
A woman who does better than to love,
I hate; she will do nothing very well:
Male poets are preferable, straining less
And teaching more." I triumphed o'er you both,
And left him.
'When I saw him afterward
I had read your shameful letter, and my heart.
He came with health recovered, strong though pale,
Lord Howe and he, a courteous pair of friends,
To say what men dare say to women, when
Their debtors. But I stopped them with a word,
And proved I had never trodden such a road
To carry so much dirt upon my shoe.
Then, putting into it something of disdain,
I asked, forsooth, his pardon, and my own,
For having done no better than to love,
And that not wisely, — though 't was long ago,
And had been mended radically since.
I told him, as I tell you now, Miss Leigh,
And proved, I took some trouble for his sake
(Because I knew he did not love the girl)
To spoil my hands with working in the stream
Of that poor bubbling nature, — till she went,
Consigned to one I trusted, my own maid
Who once had lived full five months in my house
(Dressed hair superbly), with a lavish purse,
To carry to Australia, where she had left
A husband, said she. If the creature lied,
The mission failed: we all do fail and lie
More or less — and I 'm sorry — which is all
Expected from us when we fail the most
And go to church to own it. What I meant,
Was just the best for him, and me, and her . . .
Best even for Marian! — I am sorry for 't,
And very sorry. Yet my creature said
She saw her stop to speak in Oxford Street
To one . . . no matter! I had sooner cut
My hand off (though 't were kissed the hour before,
And promised a duke's troth-ring for the next)
Than crush her silly head with so much wrong.
Poor child! I would have mended it with gold,
Until it gleamed like Saint Sophia's dome
When all the faithful troop to morning prayer:
But he, he nipped the bud of such a thought
With that cold Leigh look which I fancied once,
And broke in, "Henceforth she was called his wife:
His wife required no succor: he was bound
To Florence, to resume this broken bond:

Enough so. Both were happy, he and Howe,
To acquit me of the heaviest charge of all" —
— At which I shot my tongue against my fly
And struck him: "Would he carry — he was just —
A letter from me to Aurora Leigh,
And ratify from his authentic mouth
My answer to her accusation?" — "Yes,
If such a letter were prepared in time."
— He 's just, your cousin, — ay, abhorrently:
He 'd wash his hands in blood, to keep them clean.
And so, cold, courteous, a mere gentleman,
He bowed, we parted.
                    'Parted. Face no more,
Voice no more, love no more! — wiped wholly out
Like some ill scholar's scrawl from heart and slate, —
Ay, spit on, and so wiped out utterly
By some coarse scholar! I have been too coarse,
Too human. Have we business, in our rank,
With blood i' the veins? I will have henceforth none,
Not even to keep the color at my lip.
A rose is pink and pretty without blood:
Why not a woman? When we 've played in vain
The game, to adore, — we have resources still,
And can play on at leisure, being adored:
Here 's Smith already swearing at my feet
That I 'm the typic She. Away with Smith! —
Smith smacks of Leigh, — and henceforth I 'll admit
No socialist within three crinolines,
To live and have his being. But for you,
Though insolent your letter and absurd,
And though I hate you frankly, — take my Smith!
For when you have seen this famous marriage tied,
A most unspotted Erle to a noble Leigh
(His love astray on one he should not love),
Howbeit you may not want his love, beware,
You 'll want some comfort. So I leave you Smith,
Take Smith! — he talks Leigh's subjects, somewhat worse;
Adopts a thought of Leigh's, and dwindles it;
Goes leagues beyond, to be no inch behind;
Will mind you of him, as a shoe-string may
Of a man: and women, when they are made like you,
Grow tender to a shoe-string, footprint even,
Adore averted shoulders in a glass,
And memories of what, present once, was loathed.
And yet, you loathed not Romney, — though you played
At "fox and goose" about him with your soul;
Pass over fox, you rub out fox, — ignore
A feeling, you eradicate it, — the act 's
Identical.
                    'I wish you joy, Miss Leigh;
You 've made a happy marriage for your friend,
And all the honor well-assorted love
Derives from you who love him, whom he loves!
You need not wish *me* joy to think of it;
I have so much. Observe, Aurora Leigh,
Your droop of eyelid is the same as his,
And, but for you, I might have won his love,
And, to you, I have shown my naked heart;
For which three things, I hate, hate, hate you. Hush!
Suppose a fourth! — I cannot choose but think
That, with him, I were virtuouser than you
Without him: so I hate you from this gulf
And hollow of my soul, which opens out
To what, except for you, had been my heaven,
And is, instead, a place to curse by! LOVE.'

An active kind of curse. I stood there cursed,
Confounded. I had seized and caught the sense
Of the letter, with its twenty stinging snakes,
In a moment's sweep of eyesight, and I stood
Dazed. — 'Ah! not married.'
                    'You mistake,' he said.

'I 'm married. Is not Marian Erle my wife?
As God sees things, I have a wife and child;
And I, as I 'm a man who honors God,
Am here to claim them as my child and wife.'

I felt it hard to breathe, much less to speak.
Nor word of mine was needed. Some one else
Was there for answering. 'Romney,' she began,
'My great good angel, Romney.'
Then at first,
I knew that Marian Erle was beautiful.
She stood there, still and pallid as a saint,
Dilated, like a saint in ecstasy,
As if the floating moonshine interposed
Betwixt her foot and the earth, and raised her up
To float upon it. 'I had left my child,
Who sleeps,' she said, 'and having drawn this way,
I heard you speaking, . . . friend! — Confirm me now.
You take this Marian, such as wicked men
Have made her, for your honorable wife?'

The thrilling, solemn, proud, pathetic voice.
He stretched his arms out toward that thrilling voice,
As if to draw it on to his embrace.
— 'I take her as God made her, and as men
Must fail to unmake her, for my honored wife.'

She never raised her eyes, nor took a step,
But stood there in her place, and spoke again.
— 'You take this Marian's child, which is her shame
In sight of men and women, for your child,
Of whom you will not ever feel ashamed?'

The thrilling, tender, proud, pathetic voice.
He stepped on toward it, still with outstretched arms,
As if to quench upon his breast that voice.
— 'May God so father me, as I do him,
And so forsake me, as I let him feel
He 's orphaned haply. Here I take the child
To share my cup, to slumber on my knee,
To play his loudest gambol at my foot,
To hold my finger in the public ways,
Till none shall need inquire "Whose child is this?"
The gesture saying so tenderly "My own."'

She stood a moment silent in her place;
Then turning toward me very slow and cold: —
'And you, — what say you? — will you blame me much,
If, careful for that outcast child of mine,
I catch this hand that 's stretched to me and him,
Nor dare to leave him friendless in the world
Where men have stoned me? Have I not the right
To take so mere an aftermath from life,
Else found so wholly bare? Or is it wrong
To let your cousin, for a generous bent,
Put out his ungloved fingers among briars
To set a tumbling bird's nest somewhat straight?
You will not tell him, though we 're innocent,
We are not harmless, . . . and that both our harms
Will stick to his good, smooth, noble life like burrs,
Never to drop off though he shakes the cloak?
You 've been my friend: you will not now be his?
You 've known him that he 's worthy of a friend,
And you 're his cousin, lady, after all,
And therefore more than free to take his part,
Explaining, since the nest is surely spoilt
And Marian what you know her — though a wife,
The world would hardly understand her case
Of being just hurt and honest; while, for him,
'T would ever twit him with his bastard child
And married harlot. Speak, while yet there 's time.
You would not stand and let a good man's dog
Turn round and rend him, because his, and reared
Of a generous breed, — and will you let his act,

Because it 's generous? Speak. I 'm bound to you,
And I 'll be bound by only you, in this.'

The thrilling, solemn voice, so passionless,
Sustained, yet low, without a rise or fall,
As one who had authority to speak,
And not as Marian.
I looked up to feel
If God stood near me, and beheld his heaven
As blue as Aaron's priestly robe appeared
To Aaron when he took it off to die.
And then I spoke: 'Accept the gift, I say,
My sister Marian, and be satisfied.
The hand that gives has still a soul behind
Which will not let it quail for having given,
Though foolish worldlings talk they know not what —
Of what they know not. Romney 's strong enough
For this: do you be strong to know he 's strong:
He stands on Right's side; never flinch for him,
As if he stood on the other. You 'll be bound
By me? I am a woman of repute;
No fly-blow gossip ever specked my life;
My name is clean and open as this hand,
Whose glove there 's not a man dares blab about
As if he had touched it freely. Here 's my hand
To clasp your hand, my Marian, owned as pure!
As pure — as I 'm a woman and a Leigh! —
And, as I 'm both, I 'll witness to the world
That Romney Leigh is honored in his choice
Who chooses Marian for his honored wife.'

Her broad wild woodland eyes shot out a light,
Her smile was wonderful for rapture. 'Thanks,
My great Aurora.' Forward then she sprang,
And dropping her impassioned spaniel head
With all its brown abandonment of curls
On Romney's feet, we heard the kisses drawn
Through sobs upon the foot, upon the ground —
'O Romney! O my angel! O unchanged
Though since we 've parted I have passed the grave!
But Death itself could only better *thee*,
Not change thee! — *Thee* I do not thank at all:
I but thank God who made thee what thou art,
So wholly godlike.'
When he tried in vain
To raise her to his embrace, escaping thence
As any leaping fawn from a huntsman's grasp,
She bounded off and 'lighted beyond reach,
Before him, with a staglike majesty
Of soft, serene defiance, — as she knew
He could not touch her, so was tolerant
He had cared to try. She stood there with her great
Drowned eyes, and dripping cheeks, and strange, sweet smile
That lived through all, as if one held a light
Across a waste of waters — shook her head
To keep some thoughts down deeper in her soul, —
Then, white and tranquil like a summer-cloud
Which, having rained itself to a tardy peace,
Stands still in heaven as if it ruled the day,
Spoke out again, — 'Although, my generous friend,
Since last we met and parted you 're unchanged,
And having promised faith to Marian Erle,
Maintain it, as she were not changed at all;
And though that 's worthy, though that 's full of balm
To any conscious spirit of a girl
Who once has loved you as I loved you once —
Yet still it will not make her . . . if she 's dead,
And gone away where none can give or take
In marriage — able to revive, return
And wed you — will it, Romney? Here 's the point,
My friend, we 'll see it plainer: you and I
Must never, never, never join hands so.

Nay, let me say it — for I said it first
To God, and placed it, rounded to an oath,
Far, far above the moon there, at his feet,
As surely as I wept just now at yours —
We never, never, never join hands so.
And now, be patient with me; do not think
I ’m speaking from a false humility.
The truth is, I am grown so proud with grief,
And He has said so often through his nights
And through his mornings, “Weep a little still,
Thou foolish Marian, because women must,
But do not blush at all except for sin” —
That I, who felt myself unworthy once
Of virtuous Romney and his high-born race,
Have come to learn, — a woman, poor or rich,
Despised or honored, is a human soul,
And what her soul is, that she is herself,
Although she should be spit upon of men,
As is the pavement of the churches here,
Still good enough to pray in. And being chaste
And honest, and inclined to do the right,
And love the truth, and live my life out green
And smooth beneath his steps, I should not fear
To make him thus a less uneasy time
Than many a happier woman. Very proud
You see me. Pardon, that I set a trap
To hear a confirmation in your voice,
Both yours and yours. It is so good to know
’T was really God who said the same before;
And thus it is in heaven, that first God speaks,
And then his angels. Oh, it does me good,
It wipes me clean and sweet from devil’s dirt,
That Romney Leigh should think me worthy still
Of being his true and honorable wife!
Henceforth I need not say, on leaving earth,
I had no glory in it. For the rest,
The reason ’s ready (master, angel, friend,
Be patient with me) wherefore you and I
Can never, never, never join hands so
I know you ’ll not be angry like a man
(For *you* are none) when I shall tell the truth,
Which is, I do not love you, Romney Leigh,
I do not love you. Ah well! catch my hands,
Miss Leigh, and burn into my eyes with yours —
I swear I do not love him. Did I once?
’T is said that women have been bruised to death
And yet, if once they loved, that love of theirs
Could never be drained out with all their blood:
I ’ve heard such things and pondered. Did I indeed
Love once; or did I only worship? Yes,
Perhaps, O friend, I set you up so high
Above all actual good or hope of good
Or fear of evil, all that could be mine,
I haply set you above love itself,
And out of reach of these poor woman’s arms,
Angelic Romney. What was in my thought?
To be your slave, your help, your toy, your tool.
To be your love . . . I never thought of that:
To give you love . . . still less. I gave you love?
I think I did not give you anything;
I was but only yours — upon my knees,
All yours, in soul and body, in head and heart,
A creature you had taken from the ground
Still crumbling through your fingers to your feet
To join the dust she came from. Did I love,
Or did I worship? judge, Aurora Leigh!
But, if indeed I loved, ’t was long ago —
So long! before the sun and moon were made,
Before the hells were open, — ah, before
I heard my child cry in the desert night,
And knew he had no father. It may be
I ’m not as strong as other women are,
Who, torn and crushed, are not undone from love:
It may be I am colder than the dead,
Who, being dead, love always. But for me,

Once killed, this ghost of Marian loves no more,
No more . . . except the child! . . . no more at all.
I told your cousin, sir, that I was dead;
And now, she thinks I 'll get up from my grave,
And wear my chin-cloth for a wedding-veil,
And glide along the churchyard like a bride
While all the dead keep whispering through the withes,
“You would be better in your place with us,
You pitiful corruption!” At the thought,
The damps break out on me like leprosy
Although I 'm clean. Ay, clean as Marian Erle!
As Marian Leigh, I know, I were not clean:
Nor have I so much life that I should love,
Except the child. Ah God! I could not bear
To see my darling on a good man's knees,
And know, by such a look, or such a sigh,
Or such a silence, that he thought sometimes,
“This child was fathered by some cursèd wretch” . . .
For, Romney, angels are less tender-wise
Than God and mothers: even *you* would think
What *we* think never. He is ours, the child;
And we would sooner vex a soul in heaven
By coupling with it the dead body's thought,
It left behind it in a last month's grave,
Than, in my child, see other than . . . my child.
We only never call him fatherless
Who has God and his mother. O my babe,
My pretty, pretty blossom, an ill wind
Once blew upon my breast! can any think
I 'd have another — one called happier,
A fathered child, with father's love and race
That 's worn as bold and open as a smile,
To vex my darling when he 's asked his name
And has no answer? What! a happier child
Than mine, my best — who laughed so loud to-night
He could not sleep for pastime? Nay, I swear,
By life and love, that, if I lived like some,
And loved like . . . *some*, ay, loved you, Romney Leigh,
As some love (eyes that have wept so much, see clear),
I 've room for no more children in my arms,
My kisses are all melted on one mouth,
I would not push my darling to a stool
To dandle babies. Here 's a hand shall keep
For ever clean without a marriage-ring,
To tend my boy until he cease to need
One steadying finger of it, and desert
(Not miss) his mother's lap, to sit with men.
And when I miss him (not he me), I 'll come
And say “Now give me some of Romney's work,
To help your outcast orphans of the world
And comfort grief with grief.” For you, meantime,
Most noble Romney, wed a noble wife,
And open on each other your great souls —
I need not farther bless you. If I dared
But strain and touch her in her upper sphere,
And say “Come down to Romney — pay my debt!”
I should be joyful with the stream of joy
Sent through me. But the moon is in my face . . .
I dare not — though I guess the name he loves;
I 'm learned with my studies of old days,
Remembering how he crushed his under-lip
When some one came and spoke, or did not come.
Aurora, I could touch her with my hand,
And fly because I dare not.’
She was gone.

He smiled so sternly that I spoke in haste.
‘Forgive her — she sees clearly for herself:
Her instinct 's holy.’
‘*I* forgive!’ he said,
‘I only marvel how she sees so sure,
While others’ . . . there he paused — then hoarse, abrupt,
‘Aurora! you forgive us, her and me?

For her, the thing she sees, poor, loyal child,
If once corrected by the thing I know,
Had been unspoken, since she loves you well,
Has leave to love you: — while for me, alas!
If once or twice I let my heart escape
This night, . . . remember, where hearts slip and fall,
They break beside: we're parting — parting — ah!
You do not love, that you should surely know
What that word means. Forgive, be tolerant:
It had not been, but that I felt myself
So safe in impuissance and despair,
I could not hurt you though I tossed my arms
And sighed my soul out. The most utter wretch
Will choose his postures when he comes to die,
However in the presence of a queen;
And you'll forgive me some unseemly spasms
Which meant no more than dying. Do you think
I had ever come here in my perfect mind
Unless I had come here in my settled mind
Bound Marian's, bound to keep the bond and give
My name, my house, my hand, the things I could,
To Marian? For even *I* could give as much:
Even I, affronting her exalted soul
By a supposition that she wanted these,
Could act the husband's coat and hat set up
To creak i' the wind and drive the world-crows off
From pecking in her garden. Straw can fill
A hole to keep out vermin. Now, at last,
I own heaven's angels round her life suffice
To fight the rats of our society
Without this Romney: I can see it at last;
And here is ended my pretension which
The most pretended. Over-proud of course,
Even so! — but not so stupid . . . blind . . . that I,
Whom thus the great Taskmaster of the world
Has set to meditate mistaken work,
My dreary face against a dim blank wall
Throughout man's natural lifetime — could pretend
Or wish . . . O love, I have loved you! O my soul,
I have lost you! — but I swear by all yourself,
And all you might have been to me these years,
If that June morning had not failed my hope —
I'm not so bestial, to regret that day —
This night — this night, which still to you is fair!
Nay, not so blind, Aurora. I attest
Those stars above us which I cannot see' . . .

'You cannot' . . .
'That if Heaven itself should stoop,
Re-mix the lots, and give me another chance,
I'd say "No other!" — I'd record my blank.
Aurora never should be wife of mine."

'Not see the stars?'
''T is worse still, not to see,
To find your hand, although we're parting, dear.
A moment let me hold it ere we part;
And understand my last words — these, at last!
I would not have you thinking when I'm gone
That Romney dared to hanker for your love
In thought or vision, if attainable
(Which certainly for me it never was),
And wished to use it for a dog to-day
To help the blind man stumbling. God forbid!
And now I know He held you in his palm,
And kept you open-eyed to all my faults,
To save you at last from such a dreary end.
Believe me, dear, that, if I had known like Him
What loss was coming on me, I had done
As well in this as He has. — Farewell, you

Who are still my light, — farewell! How late it is:
I know that, now. You 've been too patient, sweet.
I will but blow my whistle toward the lane,
And some one comes — the same who brought me here.
Get in — Good-night.'
'A moment. Heavenly Christ!
A moment. Speak once, Romney. 'T is not true.
I hold your hands, I look into your face —
You see me?'
'No more than the blessèd stars.
Be blessèd too, Aurora. Nay, my sweet,
You tremble. Tender-hearted! Do you mind
Of yore, dear, how you used to cheat old John,
And let the mice out slyly from his traps,
Until he marvelled at the soul in mice
Which took the cheese and left the snare? The same
Dear soft heart always! 'T was for this I grieved
Howe's letter never reached you. Ah, you had heard
Of illness — not the issue, not the extent:
My life, long sick with tossings up and down,
The sudden revulsion in the blazing house,
The strain and struggle both of body and soul,
Which left fire running in my veins for blood,
Scarce lacked that thunderbolt of the falling beam
Which nicked me on the forehead as I passed
The gallery-door with a burden. Say heaven's bolt,
Not William Erle's, not Marian's father's, — tramp
And poacher, whom I found for what he was,
And, eager for her sake to rescue him,
Forth swept from the open highway of the world,
Road-dust and all — till, like a woodland boar
Most naturally unwilling to be tamed,
He notched me with his tooth. But not a word
To Marian! and I do not think, besides,
He turned the tilting of the beam my way;
And if he laughed, as many swear, poor wretch,
Nor he nor I supposed the hurt so deep.
We 'll hope his next laugh may be merrier,
In a better cause.'
'Blind, Romney?'
'Ah, my friend,
You 'll learn to say it in a cheerful voice;
I, too, at first desponded. To be blind,
Turned out of nature, mulcted as a man,
Refused the daily largesse of the sun
To humble creatures! When the fever's heat
Dropped from me, as the flame did from my house,
And left me ruined like it, stripped of all
The hues and shapes of aspectable life,
A mere bare blind stone in the blaze of day,
A man, upon the outside of the earth,
As dark as ten feet under, in the grave, —
Why, that seemed hard.'
'No hope?'
'A tear! you weep,
Divine Aurora? tears upon my hand!
I 've seen you weeping for a mouse, a bird, —
But, weep for me, Aurora? Yes, there 's hope.
Not hope of sight, — I could be learned, dear,
And tell you in what Greek and Latin name
The visual nerve is withered to the root,
Though the outer eyes appear indifferent,
Unspotted in their crystals. But there 's hope.
The spirit, from behind this dethroned sense,
Sees, waits in patience till the walls break up
From which the bas-relief and fresco have dropped:
There 's hope. The man here, once so arrogant
And restless, so ambitious, for his part,
Of dealing with statistically packed
Disorders (from a pattern on his nail),
And packing such things quite another way, —
Is now contented. From his personal loss

He has come to hope for others when they lose,
And wear a gladder faith in what we gain . . .
Through bitter experience, compensation sweet,
Like that tear, sweetest. I am quiet now,
As tender surely for the suffering world,
But quiet, — sitting at the wall to learn,
Content henceforth to do the thing I can:
For, though as powerless, said I, as a stone,
A stone can still give shelter to a worm,
And it is worth while being a stone for that:
There 's hope, Aurora.'
'Is there hope for me?
For me? — and is there room beneath the stone
For such a worm? — And if I came and said . . .
What all this weeping scarce will let me say,
And yet what women cannot say at all
But weeping bitterly . . . (the pride keeps up,
Until the heart breaks under it) . . . I love, —
I love you, Romney' . . .
'Silence!' he exclaimed.
'A woman's pity sometimes makes her mad.
A man's distraction must not cheat his soul
To take advantage of it. Yet, 't is hard
Farewell, Aurora.'
'But I love you, sir;
And when a woman says she loves a man,
The man must hear her, though he love her not,
Which . . . hush! . . . he has leave to answer in his turn;
She will not surely blame him. As for me,
You call it pity, — think I 'm generous?
'T were somewhat easier, for a woman proud
As I am, and I 'm very vilely proud,
To let it pass as such, and press on you
Love born of pity, — seeing that excellent loves
Are born so, often, nor the quicklier die, —
And this would set me higher by the head
Than now I stand. No matter: let the truth
Stand high; Aurora must be humble: no,
My love 's not pity merely. Obviously
I 'm not a generous woman, never was,
Or else, of old, I had not looked so near
To weights and measures, grudging you the power
To give, as first I scorned your power to judge
For me, Aurora. I would have no gifts,
Forsooth, but God's, — and I would use *them* too
According to my pleasure and my choice,
As He and I were equals, you below,
Excluded from that level of interchange
Admitting benefaction. You were wrong
In much? you said so. I was wrong in most.
Oh, most! You only thought to rescue men
By half-means, half-way, seeing half their wants,
While thinking nothing of your personal gain.
But I, who saw the human nature broad
At both sides, comprehending too the soul's,
And all the high necessities of Art,
Betrayed the thing I saw, and wronged my own life
For which I pleaded. Passioned to exalt
The artist's instinct in me at the cost
Of putting down the woman's, I forgot
No perfect artist is developed here
From any imperfect woman. Flower from root,
And spiritual from natural, grade by grade
In all our life. A handful of the earth
To make God's image! the despised poor earth,
The healthy, odorous earth, — I missed with it
The divine Breath that blows the nostrils out
To ineffable inflatus, — ay, the breath
Which love is. Art is much, but Love is more.
O Art, my Art, thou 'rt much, but Love is more!
Art symbolizes heaven, but Love is God
And makes heaven. I, Aurora, fell from mine.
I would not be a woman like the rest,
A simple woman who believes in love
And owns the right of love because she loves.

And, hearing she 's beloved, is satisfied
With what contents God: I must analyze,
Confront, and question; just as if a fly
Refused to warm itself in any sun
Till such was *in Leone:* I must fret,
Forsooth, because the month was only May,
Be faithless of the kind of proffered love,
And captious, lest it miss my dignity,
And scornful, that my lover sought a wife
To use . . . to use ! O Romney, O my love,
I am changed since then, changed wholly, — for indeed
If now you 'd stoop so low to take my love
And use it roughly, without stint or spare,
As men use common things with more behind
(And, in this, ever would be more behind)
To any mean and ordinary end, —
The joy would set me like a star, in heaven,
So high up, I should shine because of height
And not of virtue. Yet in one respect,
Just one, beloved, I am in nowise changed:
I love you, loved you . . . loved you first and last,
And love you on for ever. Now I know
I loved you always, Romney. She who died
Knew that, and said so; Lady Waldemar
Knows that; . . . and Marian. I had known the same,
Except that I was prouder than I knew,
And not so honest. Ay, and, as I live,
I should have died so, crushing in my hand
This rose of love, the wasp inside and all,
Ignoring ever to my soul and you
Both rose and pain — except for this great loss,
This great despair — to stand before your face
And know you do not see me where I stand.
You think, perhaps, I am not changed from pride
And that I chiefly bear to say such words,
Because you cannot shame me with your eyes ?
O calm, grand eyes, extinguished in a storm,
Blown out like lights o'er melancholy seas.
Though shrieked for by the shipwrecked, — O my Dark,
My Cloud, — to go before me every day
While I go ever toward the wilderness, —
I would that you could see me bare to the soul !
If this be pity, 't is so for myself,
And not for Romney ! *he* can stand alone;
A man like *him* is never overcome:
No woman like me counts him pitiable
While saints applaud him. He mistook the world;
But I mistook my own heart, and that slip
Was fatal. Romney, — will you leave me here ?
So wrong, so proud, so weak, so unconsoled,
So mere a woman ! — and I love you so,
I love you, Romney ' —
Could I see his face,
I wept so ? Did I drop against his breast,
Or did his arms constrain me ? were my cheeks
Hot, overflooded, with my tears — or his ?
And which of our two large explosive hearts
So shook me ? That, I know not. There were words
That broke in utterance . . . melted, in the fire, —
Embrace, that was convulsion, . . . then a kiss
As long and silent as the ecstatic night,
And deep, deep, shuddering breaths, which meant beyond
Whatever could be told by word or kiss.
But what he said . . . I have written day by day,
With somewhat even writing. Did I think
That such a passionate rain would intercept
And dash this last page ? What he said, indeed,
I fain would write it down here like the rest,
To keep it in my eyes, as in my ears,
The heart's sweet scripture, to be read at night
When weary, or at morning when afraid,
And lean my heaviest oath on when I swear
That, when all 's done, all tried, all counted here,
All great arts, and all good philosophies,
This love just puts its hand out in a dream
And straight outstretches all things.
What he said,
I fain would write. But if an angel spoke

In thunder, should we haply know much more
Than that it thundered? If a cloud came down
And wrapped us wholly, could we draw its shape,
As if on the outside and not overcome?
And so he spake. His breath against my face
Confused his words, yet made them more intense
(As when the sudden finger of the wind
Will wipe a row of single city-lamps
To a pure white line of flame, more luminous
Because of obliteration), more intense,
The intimate presence carrying in itself
Complete communication, as with souls
Who, having put the body off, perceive
Through simply being. Thus, 't was granted me
To know he loved me to the depth and height
Of such large natures, ever competent,
With grand horizons by the sea or land,
To love's grand sunrise. Small spheres hold small fires,
But he loved largely, as a man can love
Who, baffled in his love, dares live his life,
Accept the ends which God loves, for his own,
And lift a constant aspect.
                                        From the day
I brought to England my poor searching face
(An orphan even of my father's grave),
He had loved me, watched me, watched his soul in mine,
Which in me grew and heightened into love.
For he, a boy still, had been told the tale
Of how a fairy bride from Italy
With smells of oleanders in her hair,
Was coming through the vines to touch his hand;
Whereat the blood of boyhood on the palm
Made sudden heats. And when at last I came,
And lived before him — lived, and rarely smiled —
He smiled and loved me for the thing I was,
As every child will love the year's first flower
(Not certainly the fairest of the year,
But, in which, the complete year seems to blow),
The poor sad snowdrop, — growing between drifts,
Mysterious medium 'twixt the plant and frost,
So faint with winter while so quick with spring,
And doubtful if to thaw itself away
With that snow near it. Not that Romney Leigh
Had loved me coldly. If I thought so once,
It was as if I had held my hand in fire
And shook for cold. But now I understood,
For ever, that the very fire and heat
Of troubling passion in him burned him clear,
And shaped, to dubious order, word and act:
That, just because he loved me over all,
All wealth, all lands, all social privilege,
To which chance made him unexpected heir,
And, just because on all these lesser gifts,
Constrained by conscience and the sense of wrong,
He had stamped with steady hand God's arrow-mark
Of dedication to the human need,
He thought it should be so too, with his love.
He, passionately loving, would bring down
His love, his life, his best (because the best),
His bride of dreams, who walked so still and high
Through flowery poems as through meadow-grass,
The dust of golden lilies on her feet,
That *she* should walk beside him on the rocks
In all that clang and hewing out of men,
And help the work of help which was his life,
And prove he kept back nothing, — not his soul.
And when I failed him, — for I failed him, I,
And when it seemed he had missed my love, he thought
'Aurora makes room for a working-noon,'
And so, self-girded with torn strips of hope,

Took up his life as if it were for death
(Just capable of one heroic aim),
And threw it in the thickest of the world, —
At which men laughed as if he had drowned a dog.
No wonder, — since Aurora failed him first!
The morning and the evening made his day.

But oh, the night! oh, bitter-sweet! oh, sweet!
O dark, O moon and stars, O ecstasy
Of darkness! O great mystery of love,
In which absorbed, loss, anguish, treason's self
Enlarges rapture, — as a pebble dropped
In some full wine-cup overbrims the wine!
While we two sat together, leaned that night
So close my very garments crept and thrilled
With strange electric life, and both my cheeks
Grew red, then pale, with touches from my hair
In which his breath was, — while the golden moon
Was hung before our faces as the badge
Of some sublime inherited despair,
Since ever to be seen by only one, —
A voice said, low and rapid as a sigh,
Yet breaking, I felt conscious, from a smile,
'Thank God, who made me blind, to make me see!
Shine on, Aurora, dearest light of souls,
Which rul'st for evermore both day and night!
I am happy.'
I flung closer to his breast,
As sword that, after battle, flings to sheath;
And, in that hurtle of united souls,
The mystic motions which in common moods
Are shut beyond our sense, broke in on us,
And, as we sat, we felt the old earth spin,
And all the starry turbulence of worlds
Swing round us in their audient circles, till,
If that same golden moon were overhead
Or if beneath our feet, we did not know
And then calm, equal, smooth with weights of joy,
His voice rose, as some chief musician's song
Amid the old Jewish temple's Selah-pause,
And bade me mark how we two met at last
Upon this moon-bathed promontory of earth,
To give up much on each side, then take all.
'Beloved,' it sang, 'we must be here to work;
And men who work can only work for men,
And, not to work in vain, must comprehend
Humanity and so work humanly,
And raise men's bodies still by raising souls,
As God did first.'
'But stand upon the earth,'
I said, 'to raise them (this is human too,
There's nothing high which has not first been low;
My humbleness, said One, has made me great!)
As God did last.'
'And work all silently
And simply,' he returned, 'as God does all;
Distort our nature never for our work,
Nor count our right hands stronger for being hoofs.
The man most man, with tenderest human hands,
Works best for men, — as God in Nazareth.'

He paused upon the word, and then resumed:
'Fewer programmes, we who have no prescience.
Fewer systems, we who are held and do not hold.
Less mapping out of masses to be saved,
By nations or by sexes. Fourier's void,
And Comte absurd, — and Cabet puerile.
Subsist no rules of life outside of life,
No perfect manners without Christian souls:
The Christ Himself had been no Lawgiver
Unless He had given the life, too, with the law.'

I echoed thoughtfully: 'The man, most man,
Works best for men, and, if most man indeed,

He gets his manhood plainest from his soul:
While obviously this stringent soul itself
Obeys the old law of development,
The Spirit ever witnessing in ours,
And Love, the soul of soul, within the soul,
Evolving it sublimely. First, God's love.'

'And next,' he smiled, 'the love of wedded souls,
Which still presents that mystery's counterpart.
Sweet shadow-rose, upon the water of life,
Of such a mystic substance, Sharon gave
A name to! human, vital, fructuous rose,
Whose calyx holds the multitude of leaves,
Loves filial, loves fraternal, neighbor-loves
And civic — all fair petals, all good scents,
All reddened, sweetened from one central Heart!'

'Alas,' I cried, 'it was not long ago
You swore this very social rose smelt ill.'

'Alas,' he answered, 'is it a rose at all?
The filial 's thankless, the fraternal 's hard,
The rest is lost. I do but stand and think,
Across the waters of a troubled life
This Flower of Heaven so vainly overhangs,
What perfect counterpart would be in sight
If tanks were clearer. Let us clean the tubes,
And wait for rains. O poet, O my love,
Since *I* was too ambitious in my deed
And thought to distance all men in success
(Till God came on me, marked the place, and said
"Ill-doer, henceforth keep within this line,
Attempting less than others," — and I stand
And work among Christ's little ones, content),
Come thou, my compensation, my dear sight,
My morning-star, my morning, — rise and shine,
And touch my hills with radiance not their own.
Shine out for two, Aurora, and fulfil
My falling-short that must be! work for two,
As I, though thus restrained, for two shall love!
Gaze on, with inscient vision toward the sun,
And, from his visceral heat, pluck out the roots
Of light beyond him. Art 's a service, — mark:
A silver key is given to thy clasp,
And thou shalt stand unwearied, night and day,
And fix it in the hard, slow-turning wards,
To open, so, that intermediate door
Betwixt the different planes of sensuous form
And form insensuous, that inferior men
May learn to feel on still through these to those,
And bless thy ministration. The world waits
For help. Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work,
And both commended, for the sake of each,
By all true workers and true lovers born.
Now press the clarion on thy woman's lip
(Love's holy kiss shall still keep consecrate)
And breathe thy fine keen breath along the brass,
And blow all class-walls level as Jericho's
Past Jordan, — crying from the top of souls,
To souls that, here assembled on earth's flats,
They get them to some purer eminence
Than any hitherto beheld for clouds!
What height we know not, — but the way we know,
And how by mounting ever we attain,
And so climb on. It is the hour for souls,
That bodies, leavened by the will and love,
Be lightened to redemption. The world 's old,
But the old world waits the time to be renewed,
Toward which, new hearts in individual growth
Must quicken, and increase to multitude
In new dynasties of the race of men;
Developed whence, shall grow spontaneously
New churches, new œconomies, new laws,
Admitting freedom, new societies
Excluding falsehood: He shall make all new.'

My Romney! — Lifting up my hand in his,
As wheeled by Seeing spirits toward the east,
He turned instinctively, where, faint and far,
Along the tingling desert of the sky,
Beyond the circle of the conscious hills,
Were laid in jasper-stone as clear as glass
The first foundations of that new, near Day
Which should be builded out of heaven to God.
He stood a moment with erected brows,
In silence, as a creature might who gazed, —
Stood calm, and fed his blind, majestic eyes
Upon the thought of perfect noon: and when
I saw his soul saw, — 'Jasper first,' I said;
'And second, sapphire; third, chalcedony;
The rest in order: — last, an amethyst.'

POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS

The small volume entitled *Poems before Congress* (*London: Chapman and Hall*, 1860) which appeared about a year before Mrs. Browning's death, was the last of her published works to receive her personal supervision. Of the eight pieces which it contains, the first, *Napoleon III. in Italy*, is much the longest and most elaborate; but all are distinctly and even fiercely controversial: — *sirventes*, the Troubadours would have called them, rather than songs; and the entire volume a pamphlet, rather than a collection of poems. They were sharply criticised, at the time of their appearance, for their passionate one-sidedness and reckless glorification of the French emperor; while their severe strictures on the vacillating, and, indeed, hardly ingenuous policy of England toward Italy in her hour of supreme struggle, were bitterly resented by Mrs. Browning's fellow-countrymen. No apology for the vehemence of these indignant cries, need, however, be offered here, other than the author's own rather haughty one, prefixed to the first edition of the *Poems before Congress* and dated Rome, February, 1860. 'These poems were written under the pressure of the events they indicate, after a residence in Italy of so many years that the present triumph of great principles is heightened, to the writer's feelings, by the disastrous issue of the last movement witnessed from "Casa Guidi windows" in 1849. Yet if the verses should appear to English readers too pungently rendered to admit of a patriotic respect to the English sense of things, I will not excuse myself on such grounds, nor on the ground of my attachment to the Italian people, and my admiration for their heroic constancy and union. What I have written has simply been written, because I love truth and justice, *quand même*, "more than Plato and Plato's country, more than Dante and Dante's country," more even than Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's country.'

NAPOLEON III. IN ITALY

I

Emperor, Emperor!
From the centre to the shore,
From the Seine back to the Rhine,
Stood eight millions up and swore
By their manhood's right divine
So to elect and legislate,
This man should renew the line
Broken in a strain of fate
And leagued kings at Waterloo,
When the people's hands let go.
Emperor
Evermore.

II

With a universal shout
They took the old regalia out
From an open grave that day;
From a grave that would not close,
Where the first Napoleon lay
Expectant, in repose,
As still as Merlin, with his conquering face
Turned up in its unquenchable appeal
To men and heroes of the advancing race, —
Prepared to set the seal
Of what has been on what shall be.
Emperor
Evermore.

III

The thinkers stood aside
To let the nation act.
Some hated the new-constituted fact
Of empire, as pride treading on their pride.
Some quailed, lest what was poisonous in the past
Should graft itself in that Druidic bough
On this green Now.
Some cursed, because at last
The open heavens to which they had looked in vain
For many a golden fall of marvellous rain
Were closed in brass; and some
Wept on because a gone thing could not come;
And some were silent, doubting all things for
That popular conviction, — evermore
Emperor.

IV

That day I did not hate
Nor doubt, nor quail nor curse.
I, reverencing the people, did not bate
My reverence of their deed and oracle,
Nor vainly prate
Of better and of worse
Against the great conclusion of their will.
And yet, O voice and verse,
Which God set in me to acclaim and sing
Conviction, exaltation, aspiration,
We gave no music to the patent thing,
Nor spared a holy rhythm to throb and swim
About the name of him
Translated to the sphere of domination
By democratic passion!
I was not used, at least,
Nor can be, now or then,
To stroke the ermine beast
On any kind of throne
(Though builded by a nation for its own),
And swell the surging choir for kings of men —
'Emperor
Evermore.'

V

But now, Napoleon, now
That, leaving far behind the purple throng
Of vulgar monarchs, thou
Tread'st higher in thy deed
Than stair of throne can lead,
To help in the hour of wrong
The broken hearts of nations to be strong, —
Now, lifted as thou art
To the level of pure song,
We stand to meet thee on these Alpine snows!
And while the palpitating peaks break out
Ecstatic from somnambular repose
With answers to the presence and the shout,
We, poets of the people, who take part
With elemental justice, natural right,
Join in our echoes also, nor refrain.
We meet thee, O Napoleon, at this height
At last, and find thee great enough to praise,
Receive the poet's chrism, which smells beyond
The priest's, and pass thy ways; —
An English poet warns thee to maintain
God's word, not England's: — let his truth be true
And all men liars! with his truth respond
To all men's lie. Exalt the sword and smite
On that long anvil of the Apennine
Where Austria forged the Italian chain in view
Of seven consenting nations, sparks of fine
Admonitory light,
Till men's eyes wink before convictions new.
Flash in God's justice to the world's amaze,
Sublime Deliverer! — after many days
Found worthy of the deed thou art come to do —
Emperor
Evermore.

VI

But Italy, my Italy,
Can it last, this gleam?
Can she live and be strong,
Or is it another dream
Like the rest we have dreamed so long?
And shall it, must it be,
That after the battle-cloud has broken
She will die off again
Like the rain,
Or like a poet's song
Sung of her, sad at the end

Because her name is Italy, —
Die and count no friend ?
Is it true, — may it be spoken, —
That she who has lain so still,
With a wound in her breast,
And a flower in her hand,
And a grave-stone under her head,
While every nation at will
Beside her has dared to stand,
And flout her with pity and scorn,
Saying, 'She is at rest,
She is fair, she is dead,
And, leaving room in her stead
To Us who are later born,
This is certainly best ! '
Saying, 'Alas, she is fair,
Very fair, but dead, — give place,
And so we have room for the race.'
— Can it be true, be true,
That she lives anew ?
That she rises up at the shout of her sons,
At the trumpet of France,
And lives anew ? — is it true
That she has not moved in a trance,
As in Forty-eight ?
When her eyes were troubled with blood
Till she knew not friend from foe,
Till her hand was caught in a strait
Of her cerement and baffled so
From doing the deed she would;
And her weak foot stumbled across
The grave of a king,
And down she dropt at heavy loss,
And we gloomily covered her face and said,
'We have dreamed the thing;
She is not alive, but dead.'

VII

Now, shall we say
Our Italy lives indeed ?
And if it were not for the beat and bray
Of drum and trump of martial men,
Should we feel the underground heave and strain,
Where heroes left their dust as a seed
Sure to emerge one day ?
And if it were not for the rhythmic march
Of France and Piedmont's double hosts,
Should we hear the ghosts
Thrill through ruined aisle and arch,
Throb along the frescoed wall,
Whisper an oath by that divine
They left in picture, book, and stone,
That Italy is not dead at all ?
Ay, if it were not for the tears in our eyes,
These tears of a sudden passionate joy,
Should we see her arise
From the place where the wicked are overthrown,
Italy, Italy — loosed at length
From the tyrant's thrall,
Pale and calm in her strength ?
Pale as the silver cross of Savoy
When the hand that bears the flag is brave,
And not a breath is stirring, save
What is blown
Over the war-trump's lip of brass,
Ere Garibaldi forces the pass !

VIII

Ay, it is so, even so.
Ay, and it shall be so.
Each broken stone that long ago
She flung behind her as she went
In discouragement and bewilderment
Through the cairns of Time, and missed her way
Between to-day and yesterday,
Up springs a living man.
And each man stands with his face in the light
Of his own drawn sword,
Ready to do what a hero can.
Wall to sap, or river to ford,
Cannon to front, or foe to pursue,
Still ready to do, and sworn to be true,
As a man and a patriot can.
Piedmontese, Neapolitan,
Lombard, Tuscan, Romagnole,
Each man's body having a soul, —
Count how many they stand,
All of them sons of the land,
Every live man there
Allied to a dead man below,
And the deadest with blood to spare
To quicken a living hand
In case it should ever be slow.
Count how many they come
To the beat of Piedmont's drum,
With faces keener and grayer
Than swords of the Austrian slayer,
All set against the foe.
'Emperor
Evermore.'

IX

Out of the dust where they ground them;
Out of the holes where they dogged them;

Out of the hulks where they wound them
In iron, tortured and flogged them;
Out of the streets where they chased them,
Taxed them, and then bayonetted them;
Out of the homes where they spied on them
(Using their daughters and wives);
Out of the church where they fretted them,
Rotted their souls and debased them,
Trained them to answer with knives,
Then cursed them all at their prayers ! —
Out of cold lands, not theirs,
Where they exiled them, starved them, lied on them;
Back they come like a wind, in vain
Cramped up in the hills, that roars its road
The stronger into the open plain,
Or like a fire that burns the hotter
And longer for the crust of cinder,
Serving better the ends of the potter;
Or like a restrainèd word of God,
Fulfilling itself by what seems to hinder.
'Emperor
Evermore.'

X

Shout for France and Savoy !
Shout for the helper and doer.
Shout for the good sword's ring,
Shout for the thought still truer.
Shout for the spirits at large
Who passed for the dead this spring,
Whose living glory is sure.
Shout for France and Savoy !
Shout for the council and charge !
Shout for the head of Cavour;
And shout for the heart of a King
That 's great with a nation's joy !
Shout for France and Savoy !

XI

Take up the child, Macmahon, though
Thy hand be red
From Magenta's dead,
And riding on, in front of the troop,
In the dust of the whirlwind of war
Through the gate of the city of Milan, stoop
And take up the child to thy saddle-bow,
Nor fear the touch as soft as a flower of his smile as clear as a star !
Thou hast a right to the child, we say,
Since the women are weeping for joy as they
Who, by thy help and from this day,
Shall be happy mothers indeed.
They are raining flowers from terrace and roof:
Take up the flower in the child.
While the shout goes up of a nation freed
And heroically self-reconciled,
Till the snow on that peaked Alp aloof
Starts, as feeling God's finger anew,
And all those cold white marble fires
Of mounting saints on the Duomo-spires
Flicker against the Blue.
'Emperor
Evermore.'

XII

Ay, it is He,
Who rides at the King's right hand !
Leave room to his horse and draw to the side,
Nor press too near in the ecstasy
Of a newly delivered impassioned land:
He is moved, you see,
He who has done it all.
They call it a cold stern face;
But this is Italy
Who rises up to her place ! —
For this he fought in his youth,
Of this he dreamed in the past;
The lines of the resolute mouth
Tremble a little at last.
Cry, he has done it all !
'Emperor
Evermore.'

XIII

It is not strange that he did it,
Though the deed may seem to strain
To the wonderful, unpermitted,
For such as lead and reign.
But he is strange, this man:
The people's instinct found him
(A wind in the dark that ran
Through a chink where was no door),
And elected him and crowned him
Emperor
Evermore.

XIV

Autocrat ? let them scoff,
Who fail to comprehend
That a ruler incarnate of
The people must transcend
All common king-born kings;
These subterranean springs
A sudden outlet winning

Have special virtues to spend.
The people's blood runs through him,
Dilates from head to foot,
Creates him absolute,
And from this great beginning
Evokes a greater end
To justify and renew him —
Emperor
Evermore.

XV

What! did any maintain
That God or the people (think!)
Could make a marvel in vain? —
Out of the water-jar there
Draw wine that none could drink?
Is this a man like the rest,
This miracle, made unaware
By a rapture of popular air,
And caught to the place that was best?
You think he could barter and cheat
As vulgar diplomates use,
With the people's heart in his breast?
Prate a lie into shape
Lest truth should cumber the road;
Play at the fast and loose
Till the world is strangled with tape;
Maim the soul's complete
To fit the hole of a toad;
And filch the dogman's meat
To feed the offspring of God?

XVI

Nay, but he, this wonder,
He cannot palter nor prate,
Though many around him and under,
With intellects trained to the curve,
Distrust him in spirit and nerve
Because his meaning is straight.
Measure him ere he depart
With those who have governed and led;
Larger so much by the heart,
Larger so much by the head.
Emperor
Evermore.

XVII

He holds that, consenting or dissident,
Nations must move with the time;
Assumes that crime with a precedent
Doubles the guilt of the crime;
— Denies that a slaver's bond,
Or a treaty signed by knaves
(*Quorum magna pars* and beyond
Was one of an honest name)
Gives an inexpugnable claim
To abolish men into slaves.
Emperor
Evermore.

XVIII

He will not swagger nor boast
Of his country's meeds, in a tone
Missuiting a great man most
If such should speak of his own;
Nor will he act, on her side,
From motives baser, indeed,
Than a man of a noble pride
Can avow for himself at need;
Never, for lucre or laurels,
Or custom, though such should be rife,
Adapting the smaller morals
To measure the larger life.
He, though the merchants persuade,
And the soldiers are eager for strife,
Finds not his country in quarrels
Only to find her in trade, —
While still he accords her such honor
As never to flinch for her sake
Where men put service upon her,
Found heavy to undertake
And scarcely like to be paid:
Believing a nation may act
Unselfishly — shiver a lance
(As the least of her sons may, in fact)
And not for a cause of finance.
Emperor
Evermore.

XIX

Great is he
Who uses his greatness for all.
His name shall stand perpetually
As a name to applaud and cherish,
Not only within the civic wall
For the loyal, but also without
For the generous and free.
Just is he,
Who is just for the popular due
As well as the private debt.
The praise of nations ready to perish
Fall on him, — crown him in view
Of tyrants caught in the net,
And statesmen dizzy with fear and doubt!
And though, because they are many,
And he is merely one,
And nations selfish and cruel
Heap up the inquisitor's fuel

To kill the body of high intents,
And burn great deeds from their place,
Till this, the greatest of any,
May seem imperfectly done;
Courage, whoever circumvents!
Courage, courage, whoever is base!
The soul of a high intent, be it known,
Can die no more than any soul
Which God keeps by Him under the throne;
And this, at whatever interim,
Shall live, and be consummated
Into the being of deeds made whole.
Courage, courage! happy is he,
Of whom (himself among the dead
And silent) this word shall be said:
— That he might have had the world with him,
But chose to side with suffering men,
And had the world against him when
He came to deliver Italy.
Emperor
Evermore.

THE DANCE

Mrs. Browning told Mrs. Jameson in a letter dated Rome, February 22, 1860, that the heroine of the poem called 'The Dance' was a certain Madame de Laiatico.

I

You remember down at Florence our Cascine,
Where the people on the feast-days walk and drive,
And, through the trees, long-drawn in many a green way,
O'er-roofing hum and murmur like a hive,
The river and the mountains look alive?

II

You remember the piazzone there, the stand-place
Of carriages abrim with Florence Beauties,
Who lean and melt to music as the band plays,
Or smile and chat with some one who afoot is,
Or on horseback, in observance of male duties?

III

'T is so pretty, in the afternoons of summer,
So many gracious faces brought together!
Call it rout, or call it concert, they have come here,
In the floating of the fan and of the feather,
To reciprocate with beauty the fine weather.

IV

While the flower-girls offer nosegays (because *they* too
Go with other sweets) at every carriage-door;
Here, by shake of a white finger, signed away to
Some next buyer, who sits buying score on score,
Piling roses upon roses evermore.

V

And last season, when the French camp had its station
In the meadow-ground, things quickened and grew gayer
Through the mingling of the liberating nation
With this people; groups of Frenchmen everywhere,
Strolling, gazing, judging lightly — 'who was fair.'

VI

Then the noblest lady present took upon her
To speak nobly from her carriage for the rest:
'Pray these officers from France to do us honor
By dancing with us straightway.' The request
Was gravely apprehended as addressed.

VII

And the men of France, bareheaded, bowing lowly,
Led out each a proud signora to the space
Which the startled crowd had rounded for them — slowly,
Just a touch of still emotion in his face,
Not presuming, through the symbol, on the grace.

VIII

There was silence in the people: some lips trembled,
  But none jested. Broke the music, at a glance:
And the daughters of our princes, thus assembled,
  Stepped the measure with the gallant sons of France,
  Hush! it might have been a Mass, and not a dance.

IX

And they danced there till the blue that over-skied us
  Swooned with passion, though the footing seemed sedate;
And the mountains, heaving mighty hearts beside us,
  Sighed a rapture in a shadow, to dilate,
  And touch the holy stone where Dante sate.

X

Then the sons of France, bareheaded, lowly bowing,
  Led the ladies back where kinsmen of the south
Stood, received them; till, with burst of overflowing
  Feeling — husbands, brothers, Florence's male youth,
  Turned and kissed the martial strangers mouth to mouth.

XI

And a cry went up, a cry from all that people!
  — You have heard a people cheering, you suppose,
For the Member, mayor . . . with chorus from the steeple?
  This was different: scarce as loud, perhaps (who knows?),
  For we saw wet eyes around us ere the close.

XII

And we felt as if a nation, too long borne in
  By hard wrongers, — comprehending in such attitude
That God had spoken somewhere since the morning,
  That men were somehow brothers, by no platitude, —
  Cried exultant in great wonder and free gratitude.

A TALE OF VILLAFRANCA

TOLD IN TUSCANY

First printed in the *Athenæum*, September 24, 1859.

I

My little son, my Florentine,
  Sit down beside my knee,
And I will tell you why the sign
  Of joy which flushed our Italy
Has faded since but yesternight;
And why your Florence of delight
  Is mourning as you see.

II

A great man (who was crowned one day)
  Imagined a great Deed:
He shaped it out of cloud and clay,
  He touched it finely till the seed
Possessed the flower: from heart and brain
He fed it with large thoughts humane,
  To help a people's need.

III

He brought it out into the sun —
  They blessed it to his face:
'O great pure Deed, that hast undone
  So many bad and base!
O generous Deed, heroic Deed,
Come forth, be perfected, succeed,
  Deliver by God's grace.'

IV

Then sovereigns, statesmen, north and south,
  Rose up in wrath and fear,
And cried, protesting by one mouth,
  'What monster have we here?
A great Deed at this hour of day?
A great just Deed — and not for pay?
  Absurd, — or insincere.'

V

'And if sincere, the heavier blow
In that case we shall bear,
For where 's our blessed "status quo,"
Our holy treaties, where, —
Our rights to sell a race, or buy,
Protect and pillage, occupy,
And civilize despair?'

VI

Some muttered that the great Deed meant
A great pretext to sin;
And others, the pretext, so lent,
Was heinous (to begin).
Volcanic terms of 'great' and 'just'?
Admit such tongues of flame, the crust
Of time and law falls in.

VII

A great Deed in this world of ours?
Unheard of the pretence is:
It threatens plainly the great Powers;
Is fatal in all senses.
A just Deed in the world? — call out
The rifles! be not slack about
The national defences.

VIII

And many murmured, 'From this source
What red blood must be poured!'
And some rejoined, ''T is even worse;
What red tape is ignored!'
All cursed the Doer for an evil
Called here, enlarging on the Devil, —
There, monkeying the Lord!

IX

Some said it could not be explained,
Some, could not be excused;
And others, 'Leave it unrestrained,
Gehenna's self is loosed.'
And all cried, 'Crush it, maim it, gag it!
Set dog-toothed lies to tear it ragged,
Truncated and traduced!'

X

But He stood sad before the sun
(The peoples felt their fate).
'The world is many, — I am one;
My great Deed was too great.
God's fruit of justice ripens slow:
Men's souls are narrow, let them grow.
My brothers, we must wait.'

XI

The tale is ended, child of mine,
Turned graver at my knee.
They say your eyes, my Florentine,
Are English: it may be.
And yet I 've marked as blue a pair
Following the doves across the square
At Venice by the sea.

XII

Ah child! ah child! I cannot say
A word more. You conceive
The reason now, why just to-day
We see our Florence grieve.
Ah child, look up into the sky!
In this low world, where great Deeds die,
What matter if we live?

A COURT LADY

We have Mrs. Browning's word for it, that the Court Lady was a type, not an individual. Quite a number of the *grandes dames* of Milan in 1859 indulged in the sincere, if slightly theatrical, display of patriotism here described.

Her hair was tawny with gold, her eyes with purple were dark,
Her cheeks' pale opal burnt with a red and restless spark.

Never was lady of Milan nobler in name and in race;
Never was lady of Italy fairer to see in the face.

Never was lady on earth more true as woman and wife,
Larger in judgment and instinct, prouder in manners and life.

She stood in the early morning, and said to her maidens 'Bring
That silken robe made ready to wear at the Court of the King.

'Bring me the clasps of diamond, lucid, clear of the mote,
Clasp me the large at the waist, and clasp me the small at the throat.

'Diamonds to fasten the hair, and diamonds to fasten the sleeves,
Laces to drop from their rays, like a powder of snow from the eaves.'

Gorgeous she entered the sunlight which gathered her up in a flame,
While, straight in her open carriage, she to the hospital came.

In she went at the door, and gazing from end to end,
'Many and low are the pallets, but each is the place of a friend.'

Up she passed through the wards, and stood at a young man's bed:
Bloody the band on his brow, and livid the droop of his head.

'Art thou a Lombard, my brother? Happy art thou,' she cried,
And smiled like Italy on him: he dreamed in her face and died.

Pale with his passing soul, she went on still to a second:
He was a grave hard man, whose years by dungeons were reckoned.

Wounds in his body were sore, wounds in his life were sorer.
'Art thou a Romagnole?' Her eyes drove lightnings before her.

'Austrian and priest had joined to double and tighten the cord
Able to bind thee, O strong one, — free by the stroke of a sword.

'Now be grave for the rest of us, using the life overcast
To ripen our wine of the present (too new) in glooms of the past.'

Down she stepped to a pallet where lay a face like a girl's,
Young, and pathetic with dying, — a deep black hole in the curls.

'Art thou from Tuscany, brother? and seest thou, dreaming in pain,
Thy mother stand in the piazza, searching the list of the slain?'

Kind as a mother herself, she touched his cheeks with her hands:
'Blessed is she who has borne thee, although she should weep as she stands.'

On she passed to a Frenchman, his arm carried off by a ball:
Kneeling, — 'O more than my brother! how shall I thank thee for all?

'Each of the heroes around us has fought for his land and line,
But thou hast fought for a stranger, in hate of a wrong not thine.

'Happy are all free peoples, too strong to be dispossessed.
But blessed are those among nations who dare to be strong for the rest!'

Ever she passed on her way, and came to a couch where pined
One with a face from Venetia, white with a hope out of mind.

Long she stood and gazed, and twice she tried at the name,
But two great crystal tears were all that faltered and came.

Only a tear for Venice? — she turned as in passion and loss,
And stooped to his forehead and kissed it, as if she were kissing the cross.

Faint with that strain of heart she moved on then to another,
Stern and strong in his death. 'And dost thou suffer, my brother?'

Holding his hands in hers: — 'Out of the Piedmont lion
Cometh the sweetness of freedom! sweetest to live or to die on.'

Holding his cold rough hands, — 'Well, oh well have ye done
In noble, noble Piedmont, who would not be noble alone.'

Back he fell while she spoke. She rose to her feet with a spring, —
'That was a Piedmontese! and this is the Court of the King.'

AN AUGUST VOICE

'Una voce augusta.' — MONITORE TOSCANO.

I

YOU 'LL take back your Grand-duke?
I made the treaty upon it.
Just venture a quiet rebuke;
Dall' Ongaro write him a sonnet;
Ricasoli gently explain
Some need of the constitution:
He 'll swear to it over again,
Providing an 'easy solution.'
You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

II

You 'll take back your Grand-duke?
I promised the Emperor Francis
To argue the case by his book,
And ask you to meet his advances.
The Ducal cause, we know
(Whether you or he be the wronger),
Has very strong points; — although
Your bayonets, there, have stronger.
You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

III

You 'll take back your Grand-duke?
He is not pure altogether.
For instance, the oath which he took
(In the Forty-eight rough weather)
He 'd 'nail your flag to his mast,'
Then softly scuttled the boat you
Hoped to escape in at last,
And both by a 'Proprio motu.'
You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

IV

You 'll take back your Grand-duke?
The scheme meets nothing to shock it
In this smart letter, look,
We found in Radetsky's pocket;
Where his Highness in sprightly style
Of the flower of his Tuscans wrote,
'These heads be the hottest in file;
Pray shoot them the quickest.' Quote,
And call back the Grand-duke.

V

You 'll take back your Grand-duke?
There *are* some things to object to.
He cheated, betrayed, and forsook,
Then called in the foe to protect you.
He taxed you for wines and for meats
Throughout that eight years' pastime
Of Austria's drum in your streets —
Of course you remember the last time
You called back your Grand-duke?

VI

You 'll take back the Grand-duke?
It is not race he is poor in,
Although he never could brook
The patriot cousin at Turin.
His love of kin you discern,
By his hate of your flag and me —
So decidedly apt to turn
All colors at the sight of the Three.
You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

VII

You 'll take back your Grand-duke?
'T was weak that he fled from the Pitti;
But consider how little he shook
At thought of bombarding your city!
And, balancing that with this,
The Christian rule is plain for us;
. . . Or the Holy Father's Swiss
Have shot his Perugians in vain for us.
You 'll call back the Grand-duke.

VIII

Pray take back your Grand-duke.
— I, too, have suffered persuasion.
All Europe, raven and rook,
Screeched at me armed for your nation.
Your cause in my heart struck spurs;
I swept such warnings aside for you:
My very child's eyes, and Hers,
Grew like my brother's who died for you.
You 'll call back the Grand-duke?

IX

You 'll take back your Grand-duke?
My French fought nobly with reason, —
Left many a Lombardy nook
Red as with wine out of season.
Little we grudged what was done there,
Paid freely your ransom of blood:
Our heroes stark in the sun there
We would not recall if we could.
You 'll call back the Grand-duke?

X

You 'll take back your Grand-duke?
His son rode fast as he got off
That day on the enemy's hook,
When *I* had an epaulet shot off.
Though splashed (as I saw him afar — no,

Near) by those ghastly rains,
The mark, when you 've washed him in Arno,
Will scarcely be larger than Cain's.
You 'll call back the Grand-duke ?

XI

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
'T will be so simple, quite beautiful:
The shepherd recovers his crook,
. . . If you should be sheep, and dutiful.
I spoke a word worth chalking
On Milan's wall — but stay,
Here 's Poniatowsky talking, —
You 'll listen to *him* to-day,
And call back the Grand-duke.

XII

You 'll take back your Grand-duke ?
Observe, there 's no one to force it, —
Unless the Madonna, Saint Luke
Drew for you, choose to endorse it.
I charge you, by great Saint Martino
And prodigies quickened by wrong,
Remember your Dead on Ticino;
Be worthy, be constant, be strong —
Bah ! — call back the Grand-duke ! !

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

'ὡς βασιλεῖ, ὡς θεῷ, ὡς νεκρῷ.'
— GREGORY NAZIANZEN.

I

THE Pope on Christmas Day
Sits in Saint Peter's chair;
But the peoples murmur and say
'Our souls are sick and forlorn,
And who will show us where
Is the stable where Christ was born ?'

II

The star is lost in the dark;
The manger is lost in the straw,
The Christ cries faintly . . . hark ! . . .
Through bands that swaddle and strangle —
But the Pope in the chair of awe
Looks down the great quadrangle.

III

The Magi kneel at his foot,
Kings of the East and West,
But, instead of the angels (mute
Is the 'Peace on earth' of their song),
The peoples, perplexed and opprest,
Are sighing 'How long, how long ?'

IV

And, instead of the kine, bewilder in
Shadow of aisle and dome,
The bear who tore up the children,
The fox who burnt up the corn,
And the wolf who suckled at Rome
Brothers to slay and to scorn.

V

Cardinals left and right of him,
Worshippers round and beneath,
The silver trumpets at sight of him
Thrill with a musical blast:
But the people say through their teeth,
'Trumpets ? we wait for the Last !'

VI

He sits in the place of the Lord,
And asks for the gifts of the time;
Gold, for the haft of a sword
To win back Romagna averse,
Incense, to sweeten a crime,
And myrrh, to embitter a curse.

VII

Then a king of the West said 'Good ! —
I bring thee the gifts of the time;
Red, for the patriot's blood,
Green, for the martyr's crown,
White, for the dew and the rime,
When the morning of God comes down.

VIII

— O mystic tricolor bright !
The Pope's heart quailed like a man's;
The cardinals froze at the sight,
Bowing their tonsures hoary:
And the eyes in the peacock-fans
Winked at the alien glory.

IX

But the peoples exclaimed in hope,
'Now blessed be he who has brought
These gifts of the time to the Pope,
When our souls were sick and forlorn.
— And *here* is the star we sought,
To show us where Christ was born !'

ITALY AND THE WORLD

I

Florence, Bologna, Parma, Modena:
When you named them a year ago,
So many graves reserved by God, in a
Day of Judgment, you seemed to know,
To open and let out the resurrection.

II

And meantime (you made your reflection
If you were English), was nought to be done
But sorting sables, in predilection
For all those martyrs dead and gone,
Till the new earth and heaven made ready.

III

And if your politics were not heady,
Violent, . . . 'Good,' you added, 'good
In all things! Mourn on sure and steady.
Churchyard thistles are wholesome food
For our European wandering asses.

IV

'The date of the resurrection passes
Human foreknowledge: men unborn
Will gain by it (even in the lower classes),
But none of these. It is not the morn
Because the cock of France is crowing.

V

'Cocks crow at midnight, seldom knowing
Starlight from dawn-light! 't is a mad
Poor creature.' Here you paused, and growing
Scornful, — suddenly, let us add,
The trumpet sounded, the graves were open.

VI

Life and life and life! agrope in
The dusk of death, warm hands, stretched out
For swords, proved more life still to hope in,
Beyond and behind. Arise with a shout,
Nation of Italy, slain and buried!

VII

Hill to hill and turret to turret
Flashing the tricolor, — newly created
Beautiful Italy, calm, unhurried,
Rise heroic and renovated,
Rise to the final restitution.

VIII

Rise; prefigure the grand solution
Of earth's municipal, insular schisms, —
Statesmen draping self-love's conclusion
In cheap vernacular patriotisms,
Unable to give up Judæa for Jesus.

IX

Bring us the higher example; release us
Into the larger coming time.
And into Christ's broad garment piece us
Rags of virtue as poor as crime,
National selfishness, civic vaunting.

X

No more Jew nor Greek then, — taunting
Nor taunted; — no more England nor France!
But one confederate brotherhood planting
One flag only, to mark the advance,
Onward and upward, of all humanity.

XI

For civilization perfected
Is fully developed Christianity.
'Measure the frontier,' shall it be said,
'Count the ships,' in national vanity?
— Count the nation's heart-beats sooner.

XII

For, though behind by a cannon or schooner,
That nation still is predominant
Whose pulse beats quickest in zeal to oppugn or
Succor another, in wrong or want,
Passing the frontier in love and abhorrence.

XIII

Modena, Parma, Bologna, Florence,
Open us out the wider way!
Dwarf in that chapel of old Saint Lawrence
Your Michel Angelo's giant Day,
With the grandeur of this Day breaking o'er us!

XIV

Ye who, restrained as an ancient chorus,
Mute while the coryphæus spake,
Hush your separate voices before us,
Sink your separate lives for the sake
Of one sole Italy's living for ever!

XV

Givers of coat and cloak too, — never
Grudging that purple of yours at the best, —
By your heroic will and endeavor
Each sublimely dispossessed,
That all may inherit what each surrenders!

XVI

Earth shall bless you, O noble emenders
On egotist nations! Ye shall lead
The plough of the world, and sow new splendors
Into the furrow of things for seed, —
Ever the richer for what ye have given.

XVII

Lead us and teach us, till earth and heaven
Grow larger around us and higher above.
Our sacrament-bread has a bitter leaven;
We bait our traps with the name of love,
Till hate itself has a kinder meaning.

XVIII

Oh, this world: this cheating and screening
Of cheats! this conscience for candlewicks,
Not beacon-fires! this overweening
Of underhand diplomatical tricks,
Dared for the country while scorned for the counter!

XIX

Oh, this envy of those who mount here,
And oh, this malice to make them trip!
Rather quenching the fire there, drying the fount here,
To frozen body and thirsty lip,
Than leave to a neighbor their ministration.

XX

I cry aloud in my poet-passion,
Viewing my England o'er Alp and sea.
I loved her more in her ancient fashion:
She carries her rifles too thick for me
Who spares them so in the cause of a brother.

XXI

Suspicion, panic? end this pother.
The sword, kept sheathless at peace-time, rusts.
None fears for himself while he feels for another:
The brave man either fights or trusts,
And wears no mail in his private chamber.

XXII

Beautiful Italy! golden amber
Warm with the kisses of lover and traitor!
Thou who hast drawn us on to remember,
Draw us to hope now: let us be greater
By this new future than that old story.

XXIII

Till truer glory replaces all glory,
As the torch grows blind at the dawn of day;
And the nations, rising up, their sorry
And foolish sins shall put away,
As children their toys when the teacher enters.

XXIV

Till Love's one centre devour these centres
Of many self-loves; and the patriot's trick
To better his land by egotist ventures,
Defamed from a virtue, shall make men sick,
As the scalp at the belt of some red hero.

XXV

For certain virtues have dropped to zero,
Left by the sun on the mountain's dewy side;
Churchman's charities, tender as Nero,
Indian suttee, heathen suicide,
Service to rights divine, proved hollow:

XXVI

And Heptarchy patriotisms must follow. —
National voices, distinct yet dependent,
Ensphering each other, as swallow does swallow,
With circles still widening and ever ascendant,
In multiform life to united progression, —

XXVII

These shall remain. And when, in the session
Of nations, the separate language is heard,
Each shall aspire, in sublime indiscretion,
To help with a thought or exalt with a word
Less her own than her rival's honor.

XXVIII

Each Christian nation shall take upon her
The law of the Christian man in vast:
The crown of the getter shall fall to the donor,
And last shall be first while first shall be last,
And to love best shall still be, to reign unsurpassed.

A CURSE FOR A NATION

PROLOGUE

I HEARD an angel speak last night,
And he said 'Write!
Write a Nation's curse for me,
And send it over the Western Sea.'

I faltered, taking up the word:
'Not so, my lord!
If curses must be, choose another
To send thy curse against my brother.

'For I am bound by gratitude,
By love and blood,
To brothers of mine across the sea,
Who stretch out kindly hands to me.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
From the summits of love a curse is driven,
As lightning is from the tops of heaven.'

'Not so,' I answered. 'Evermore
My heart is sore
For my own land's sins: for little feet
Of children bleeding along the street:

'For parked-up honors that gainsay
The right of way:
For almsgiving through a door that is
Not open enough for two friends to kiss:

'For love of freedom which abates
Beyond the Straits:
For patriot virtue starved to vice on
Self-praise, self-interest, and suspicion:

'For an oligarchic parliament,
And bribes well-meant.
What curse to another land assign,
When heavy-souled for the sins of mine?'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
Because thou hast strength to see and hate
A foul thing done *within* thy gate.'

'Not so,' I answered once again.
'To curse, choose men.
For I, a woman, have only known
How the heart melts and the tears run down.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
Some women weep and curse, I say
(And no one marvels), night and day.

'And thou shalt take their part to-night,
Weep and write.
A curse from the depths of womanhood
Is very salt, and bitter, and good.'

So thus I wrote, and mourned indeed,
What all may read.
And thus, as was enjoined on me,
I send it over the Western Sea.

THE CURSE

I

BECAUSE ye have broken your own chain
With the strain
Of brave men climbing a Nation's height,
Yet thence bear down with brand and thong
On souls of others, — for this wrong
This is the curse. Write.

Because yourselves are standing straight
In the state
Of Freedom's foremost acolyte,
Yet keep calm footing all the time
On writhing bond-slaves, — for this crime
This is the curse. Write.

Because ye prosper in God's name,
With a claim
To honor in the old world's sight,
Yet do the fiend's work perfectly
In strangling martyrs, — for this lie
This is the curse. Write.

II

Ye shall watch while kings conspire
Round the people's smouldering fire,
And, warm for your part,
Shall never dare — O shame!
To utter the thought into flame
Which burns at your heart.
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while nations strive
With the bloodhounds, die or survive,
Drop faint from their jaws,
Or throttle them backward to death;
And only under your breath
Shall favor the cause.
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while strong men draw
The nets of feudal law
To strangle the weak;
And, counting the sin for a sin,
Your soul shall be sadder within
Than the word ye shall speak.
This is the curse. Write.

When good men are praying erect
That Christ may avenge his elect
And deliver the earth,
The prayer in your ears, said low,
Shall sound like the tramp of a foe
That 's driving you forth.
This is the curse. Write.

When wise men give you their praise,
They shall pause in the heat of the phrase,
As if carried too far.
When ye boast your own charters kept true,
Ye shall blush; for the thing which ye do
Derides what ye are.
This is the curse. Write.

When fools cast taunts at your gate,
Your scorn ye shall somewhat abate
As ye look o'er the wall;
For your conscience, tradition, and name
Explode with a deadlier blame
Than the worst of them all.
This is the curse. Write.

Go, wherever ill deeds shall be done,
Go, plant your flag in the sun
Beside the ill-doers!
And recoil from clenching the curse
Of God's witnessing Universe
With a curse of yours.
THIS is the curse. Write.

LAST POEMS

TO 'GRATEFUL FLORENCE,'

TO THE MUNICIPALITY, HER REPRESENTATIVE,
AND TO TOMMASEO, ITS SPOKESMAN,

MOST GRATEFULLY

The last winter of Mrs. Browning's life was passed at No. 16 Via Felice, now the Via Sistina, Rome. She died in Florence on the evening of June 29, 1861, leaving behind her a short list of unpublished poems which she herself had drawn up, doubtless with a view to another volume. A few of these had already appeared in periodicals. One, 'De Profundis,' had been written twenty years before. These poems her husband brought out in London in the ensuing February (London, Chapman and Hall, 193 Piccadilly, 1862), adding the translations which here accompany them; concerning which last he says: 'They were intended many years ago to accompany and explain certain engravings after ancient Gems, in the projected works of a friend by whose kindness they are now recovered; but as two of the original series (the "Adonis of Bion and the "Song to the Rose" from Achilles Tatius) have subsequently appeared, it is presumed that the remainder may not improperly follow. A single recent version (from Heine) is added.'

The words 'grateful Florence,' '*grata Firenze*,' in the dedication to this last volume, are a quotation from the memorial tablet to Mrs. Browning's memory, inserted in the wall of Casa Guidi by the municipality of Florence.

LITTLE MATTIE

First printed in the *Cornhill Magazine*, June, 1861.

I

Dead! Thirteen a month ago!
Short and narrow her life's walk;
Lover's love she could not know
Even by a dream or talk:
Too young to be glad of youth,
Missing honor, labor, rest,
And the warmth of a babe's mouth
At the blossom of her breast.
Must you pity her for this
And for all the loss it is,
You, her mother, with wet face,
Having had all in your case?

II

Just so young but yesternight,
Now she is as old as death.
Meek, obedient in your sight,
Gentle to a beck or breath
Only on last Monday! Yours,
Answering you like silver bells
Lightly touched! An hour matures:
You can teach her nothing else.
She has seen the mystery hid
Under Egypt's pyramid:
By those eyelids pale and close
Now she knows what Rhamses knows.

III

Cross her quiet hands, and smooth
Down her patient locks of silk,
Cold and passive as in truth
You your fingers in spilt milk
Drew along a marble floor;
But her lips you cannot wring
Into saying a word more,
'Yes,' or 'No,' or such a thing:
Though you call and beg and wreak
Half your soul out in a shriek,
She will lie there in default
And most innocent revolt.

IV

Ay, and if she spoke, maybe
She would answer, like the Son,
'What is now 'twixt thee and me?'
Dreadful answer! better none.
Yours on Monday, God's to-day!
Yours, your child, your blood, your heart,
Called . . . you called her, did you say,
'Little Mattie' for your part?
Now already it sounds strange,
And you wonder, in this change,
What He calls his angel-creature,
Higher up than you can reach her.

V

'T was a green and easy world
As she took it; room to play
(Though one's hair might get uncurled
At the far end of the day).
What she suffered she shook off
In the sunshine; what she sinned
She could pray on high enough
To keep safe above the wind.
If reproved by God or you,
'T was to better her, she knew;
And if crossed, she gathered still
'T was to cross out something ill.

VI

You, you had the right, you thought,
To survey her with sweet scorn,
Poor gay child, who had not caught
Yet the octave-stretch forlorn
Of your larger wisdom! Nay,
Now your places are changed so,
In that same superior way
She regards you dull and low
As you did herself exempt
From life's sorrows. Grand contempt
Of the spirits risen awhile,
Who look back with such a smile!

VII

There 's the sting of 't. That, I think,
Hurts the most a thousandfold!
To feel sudden, at a wink,
Some dear child we used to scold,
Praise, love both ways, kiss and tease,
Teach and tumble as our own,
All its curls about our knees,
Rise up suddenly full-grown.
Who could wonder such a sight
Made a woman mad outright?
Show me Michael with the sword
Rather than such angels, Lord!

A FALSE STEP

Sweet, thou hast trod on a heart.
Pass; there 's a world full of men;
And women as fair as thou art
Must do such things now and then.

Thou hast only stepped unaware, —
Malice, not one can impute;
And why should a heart have been there
In the way of a fair woman's foot?

It was not a stone that could trip,
Nor was it a thorn that could rend:
Put up thy proud under-lip!
'T was merely the heart of a friend.

And yet peradventure one day
Thou, sitting alone at the glass,
Remarking the bloom gone away,
Where the smile in its dimplement was,

And seeking around thee in vain
From hundreds who flattered before,
Such a word as 'Oh, not in the main
Do I hold thee less precious, but more!' . . .

Thou 'lt sigh, very like, on thy part,
'Of all I have known or can know,
I wish I had only that Heart
I trod upon ages ago!'

VOID IN LAW

I

Sleep, little babe, on my knee,
Sleep, for the midnight is chill,
And the moon has died out in the tree,
And the great human world goeth ill.
Sleep, for the wicked agree:
Sleep, let them do as they will.
Sleep.

II

Sleep, thou hast drawn from my breast
The last drop of milk that was good;
And now, in a dream, suck the rest,
Lest the real should trouble thy blood.
Suck, little lips dispossessed,
As we kiss in the air whom we would.
Sleep.

III

O lips of thy father! the same,
So like! Very deeply they swore
When he gave me his ring and his name,
To take back, I imagined, no more!
And now is all changed like a game,
Though the old cards are used as of yore?
Sleep.

IV

'Void in law,' said the Courts. Something wrong
In the forms? Yet, 'Till death part us two,
I, James, take thee, Jessie,' was strong,
And One witness competent. True
Such a marriage was worth an old song,
Heard in Heaven though, as plain as the New.
Sleep.

V

Sleep, little child, his and mine!
Her throat has the antelope curve,
And her cheek just the color and line
Which fade not before him nor swerve:
Yet *she* has no child! — the divine
Seal of right upon loves that deserve.
Sleep.

VI

My child! though the world take her part,
Saying 'She was the woman to choose;
He had eyes, was a man in his heart,' —
We twain the decision refuse:
We . . . weak as I am, as thou art, . . .
Cling on to him, never to loose.
Sleep.

VII

He thinks that, when done with this place,
All 's ended! he 'll new-stamp the ore?
Yes, Cæsar's — but not in our case.
Let him learn we are waiting before
The grave's mouth, the heaven's gate, God's face,
With implacable love evermore.
Sleep.

VIII

He 's ours, though he kissed her but now,
He 's ours, though she kissed in reply:
He 's ours, though himself disavow,

And God's universe favor the lie;
Ours to claim, ours to clasp, ours below,
Ours above, . . . if we live, if we die.
Sleep.

IX

Ah baby, my baby, too rough
Is my lullaby? What have I said?
Sleep! When I've wept long enough
I shall learn to weep softly instead,
And piece with some alien stuff
My heart to lie smooth for thy head.
Sleep.

X

Two souls met upon thee, my sweet;
Two loves led thee out to the sun:
Alas, pretty hands, pretty feet,
If the one who remains (only one)
Set her grief at thee, turned in a heat
To thine enemy, — were it well done?
Sleep.

XI

May He of the manger stand near
And love thee! An infant He came
To his own who rejected Him here,
But the Magi brought gifts all the same.
I hurry the cross on my Dear!
My gifts are the griefs I declaim!
Sleep.

LORD WALTER'S WIFE

This poem, to Mrs. Browning's deep chagrin, was rejected (with a thousand apologies) by Thackeray, as editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, on account of the *risqué* character of its subject.

'BUT why do you go?' said the lady, while both sat under the yew,
And her eyes were alive in their depth, as the kraken beneath the sea-blue.

'Because I fear you,' he answered; — 'because you are far too fair,
And able to strangle my soul in a mesh of your gold-colored hair.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason! Such knots are quickly undone,
And too much beauty, I reckon, is nothing but too much sun.'

'Yet farewell so,' he answered; — 'the sunstroke 's fatal at times.
I value your husband, Lord Walter, whose gallop rings still from the limes.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason. You smell a rose through a fence:
If two should smell it, what matter? who grumbles, and where 's the pretence?'

'But I,' he replied, 'have promised another, when love was free,
To love her alone, alone, who alone and afar loves me.'

'Why, that,' she said, 'is no reason. Love 's always free, I am told.
Will you vow to be safe from the headache on Tuesday, and think it will hold?'

'But you,' he replied, 'have a daughter, a young little child, who was laid
In your lap to be pure; so I leave you: the angels would make me afraid.'

'Oh, that,' she said, 'is no reason. The angels keep out of the way;
And Dora, the child, observes nothing, although you should please me and stay.'

At which he rose up in his anger, — 'Why, now, you no longer are fair!
Why, now, you no longer are fatal, but ugly and hateful, I swear.'

At which she laughed out in her scorn: 'These men! Oh, these men over-nice,
Who are shocked if a color not virtuous is frankly put on by a vice.'

Her eyes blazed upon him — 'And *you*'
You bring us your vices so near
That we smell them! You think in our presence a thought 't would defame us to hear!

'What reason had you, and what right, —
I appeal to your soul from my life, —
To find me too fair as a woman? Why, sir, I am pure, and a wife.

'Is the day-star too fair up above you? It
burns you not. Dare you imply
I brushed you more close than the star does,
when Walter had set me as high?

'If a man finds a woman too fair, he means
simply adapted too much
To uses unlawful and fatal. The praise! —
shall I thank you for such?

'Too fair? — not unless you misuse us!
and surely if, once in a while,
You attain to it, straightway you call us no
longer too fair, but too vile.

'A moment, — I pray your attention! — I
have a poor word in my head
I must utter, though womanly custom
would set it down better unsaid.

'You grew, sir, pale to impertinence, once
when I showed you a ring.
You kissed my fan when I dropped it. No
matter! — I 've broken the thing.

'You did me the honor, perhaps, to be
moved at my side now and then
In the senses — a vice, I have heard, which
is common to beasts and some men.

'Love 's a virtue for heroes! — as white as
the snow on high hills,
And immortal as every great soul is that
struggles, endures, and fulfils.

'I love my Walter profoundly, — you,
Maude, though you faltered a week,
For the sake of . . . what was it — an eyebrow?
or, less still, a mole on a
cheek?

'And since, when all 's said, you 're too
noble to stoop to the frivolous cant
About crimes irresistible, virtues that swindle,
betray, and supplant,

'I determined to prove to yourself that,
whate'er you might dream or avow
By illusion, you wanted precisely no more
of me than you have now.

'There! Look me full in the face! — in
the face. Understand, if you can,
That the eyes of such women as I am are
clean as the palm of a man.

'Drop his hand, you insult him. Avoid us
for fear we should cost you a scar —
You take us for harlots, I tell you, and not
for the women we are.

'You wronged me: but then I considered
. . . there 's Walter! And so at
the end
I vowed that he should not be mulcted, by
me, in the hand of a friend.

'Have I hurt you indeed? We are quits
then. Nay, friend of my Walter,
be mine!
Come, Dora, my darling, my angel, and
help me to ask him to dine.'

BIANCA AMONG THE NIGHTINGALES

I

The cypress stood up like a church
That night we felt our love would hold,
And saintly moonlight seemed to search
And wash the whole world clean as gold;
The olives crystallized the vales'
Broad slopes until the hills grew strong:
The fireflies and the nightingales
Throbbed each to either, flame and song.
The nightingales, the nightingales!

II

Upon the angle of its shade
The cypress stood, self-balanced high;
Half up, half down, as double-made,
Along the ground, against the sky;
And *we*, too! from such soul-height went
Such leaps of blood, so blindly driven,
We scarce knew if our nature meant
Most passionate earth or intense heaven.
The nightingales, the nightingales!

III

We paled with love, we shook with love,
We kissed so close we could not vow;
Till Giulio whispered 'Sweet, above
God's Ever guaranties this Now.'
And through his words the nightingales
Drove straight and full their long clear
call,
Like arrows through heroic mails,
And love was awful in it all.
The nightingales, the nightingales!

IV

O cold white moonlight of the north,
  Refresh these pulses, quench this hell!
O coverture of death drawn forth
  Across this garden-chamber . . . well!
But what have nightingales to do
  In gloomy England, called the free . . .
(Yes, free to die in! . . .) when we two
  Are sundered, singing still to me?
And still they sing, the nightingales!

V

I think I hear him, how he cried
  'My own soul's life!' between their notes.
Each man has but one soul supplied,
  And that 's immortal. Though his throat 's
On fire with passion now, to *her*
  He can't say what to me he said!
And yet he moves her, they aver.
  The nightingales sing through my head, —
The nightingales, the nightingales!

VI

He says to her what moves her most.
  He would not name his soul within
Her hearing, — rather pays her cost
  With praises to her lips and chin.
Man has but one soul, 't is ordained,
  And each soul but one love, I add;
Yet souls are damned and love 's profaned;
  These nightingales will sing me mad!
The nightingales, the nightingales!

VII

I marvel how the birds can sing.
  There 's little difference, in their view,
Betwixt our Tuscan trees that spring
  As vital flames into the blue,
And dull round blots of foliage meant,
  Like saturated sponges here
To suck the fogs up. As content
  Is he too in this land, 't is clear.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

VIII

My Native Florence! dear, forgone!
  I see across the Alpine ridge
How the last feast-day of Saint John
  Shot rockets from Carraia bridge.
The luminous city, tall with fire,
  Trod deep down in that river of ours,
While many a boat with lamp and choir
  Skimmed birdlike over glittering towers.
I will not hear these nightingales.

IX

I seem to float, *we* seem to float
  Down Arno's stream in festive guise;
A boat strikes flame into our boat,
  And up that lady seems to rise
As then she rose. The shock had flashed
  A vision on us! What a head,
What leaping eyeballs! — beauty dashed
  To splendor by a sudden dread.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

X

Too bold to sin, too weak to die;
  Such women are so. As for me,
I would we had drowned there, he and I,
  That moment, loving perfectly.
He had not caught her with her loosed
  Gold ringlets . . . rarer in the south . . .
Nor heard the 'Grazie tanto' bruised
  To sweetness by her English mouth.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

XI

She had not reached him at my heart
  With her fine tongue, as snakes indeed
Kill flies; nor had I, for my part,
  Yearned after, in my desperate need,
And followed him as he did her
  To coasts left bitter by the tide,
Whose very nightingales, elsewhere
  Delighting, torture and deride!
For still they sing, the nightingales.

XII

A worthless woman; mere cold clay
  As all false things are: but so fair,
She takes the breath of men away
  Who gaze upon her unaware.
I would not play her larcenous tricks
  To have her looks! She lied and stole,
And spat into my love's pure pyx
  The rank saliva of her soul.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

XIII

I would not for her white and pink,
  Though such he likes — her grace of limb,
Though such he has praised — nor yet, I think,
  For life itself, though spent with him,

Commit such sacrilege, affront
God's nature which is love, intrude
'Twixt two affianced souls, and hunt
Like spiders, in the altar's wood.
I cannot bear these nightingales.

XIV

If she chose sin, some gentler guise
She might have sinned in, so it seems:
She might have pricked out both my eyes,
And I still seen him in my dreams!
— Or drugged me in my soup or wine,
Nor left me angry afterward:
To die here with his hand in mine,
His breath upon me, were not hard.
(Our Lady hush these nightingales!)

XV

But set a springe for *him*, 'mio ben,'
My only good, my first last love! —
Though Christ knows well what sin is, when
He sees some things done they must move
Himself to wonder. Let her pass.
I think of her by night and day.
Must *I* too join her . . . out, alas! . . .
With Giulio, in each word I say?
And evermore the nightingales!

XVI

Giulio, my Giulio! — sing they so,
And you be silent? Do I speak,
And you not hear? An arm you throw
Round some one, and I feel so weak?
— Oh, owl-like birds! They sing for spite,
They sing for hate, they sing for doom,
They 'll sing through death who sing through night,
They 'll sing and stun me in the tomb —
The nightingales, the nightingales!

MY KATE

I

She was not as pretty as women I know,
And yet all your best made of sunshine and snow
Drop to shade, melt to nought in the long-trodden ways,
While she 's still remembered on warm and cold days —
My Kate.

II

Her air had a meaning, her movements a grace;
You turned from the fairest to gaze on her face:
And when you had once seen her forehead and mouth,
You saw as distinctly her soul and her truth —
My Kate.

III

Such a blue inner light from her eyelids outbroke,
You looked at her silence and fancied she spoke:
When she did, so peculiar yet soft was the tone,
Though the loudest spoke also, you heard her alone —
My Kate.

IV

I doubt if she said to you much that could act
As a thought or suggestion: she did not attract
In the sense of the brilliant or wise: I infer
'T was her thinking of others made you think of her —
My Kate.

V

She never found fault with you, never implied
Your wrong by her right; and yet men at her side
Grew nobler, girls purer, as through the whole town
The children were gladder that pulled at her gown —
My Kate.

VI

None knelt at her feet confessed lovers in thrall;
They knelt more to God than they used, — that was all:
If you praised her as charming, some asked what you meant,
But the charm of her presence was felt when she went —
My Kate.

VII

The weak and the gentle, the ribald and rude,
She took as she found them, and did them all good;
It always was so with her — see what you have!
She has made the grass greener even here . . . with her grave —
My Kate.

VIII

My dear one! — when thou wast alive with the rest,
I held thee the sweetest and loved thee the best:
And now thou art dead, shall I not take thy part
As thy smiles used to do for thyself, my sweet Heart —
My Kate?

A SONG FOR THE RAGGED SCHOOLS OF LONDON

WRITTEN IN ROME

The 'Song for the Ragged Schools' was written in 1854 for the table at a Charity Bazaar in London presided over by Mrs. Browning's sister, Arabel Barrett. Mr. Browning also contributed a poem called 'The Twins' (later included in his *Dramatic Romances*), and the two were printed with the names of husband and wife, in a thin pamphlet, price 6*d*.

I AM listening here in Rome.
'England 's strong,' say many speakers,
'If she winks, the Czar must come,
Prow and topsail, to the breakers.'

'England 's rich in coal and oak,'
Adds a Roman, getting moody;
'If she shakes a travelling cloak,
Down our Appian roll the scudi.'

'England 's righteous,' they rejoin:
'Who shall grudge her exaltations,
When her wealth of golden coin
Works the welfare of the nations?'

I am listening here in Rome.
Over Alps a voice is sweeping —
'England 's cruel, save us some
Of these victims in her keeping!'

As the cry beneath the wheel
Of an old triumphant Roman
Cleft the people's shouts like steel,
While the show was spoilt for no man,

Comes that voice. Let others shout,
Other poets praise my land here:
I am sadly sitting out,
Praying, 'God forgive her grandeur.'

Shall we boast of empire, where
Time with ruin sits commissioned?
In God's liberal blue air
Peter's dome itself looks wizened;

And the mountains, in disdain,
Gather back their lights of opal
From the dumb despondent plain
Heaped with jawbones of a people.

Lordly English, think it o'er,
Cæsar's doing is all undone!
You have cannons on your shore,
And free Parliaments in London;

Princes' parks, and merchants' homes,
Tents for soldiers, ships for seamen, —
Ay, but ruins worse than Rome's
In your pauper men and women.

Women leering through the gas
(Just such bosoms used to nurse you),
Men, turned wolves by famine — pass!
Those can speak themselves, and curse you.

But these others — children small,
Spilt like blots about the city,
Quay, and street, and palace-wall —
Take them up into your pity!

Ragged children with bare feet,
Whom the angels in white raiment
Know the names of, to repeat
When they come on you for payment.

Ragged children, hungry-eyed,
Huddled up out of the coldness
On your doorsteps, side by side,
Till your footman damns their boldness.

In the alleys, in the squares,
Begging, lying little rebels;
In the noisy thoroughfares,
Struggling on with piteous trebles.

Patient children — think what pain
  Makes a young child patient — ponder !
Wronged too commonly to strain
  After right, or wish, or wonder.

Wicked children, with peaked chins,
  And old foreheads ! there are many
With no pleasures except sins,
  Gambling with a stolen penny.

Sickly children, that whine low
  To themselves and not their mothers,
From mere habit, — never so
  Hoping help or care from others.

Healthy children, with those blue
  English eyes, fresh from their Maker,
Fierce and ravenous, staring through
  At the brown loaves of the baker.

I am listening here in Rome,
  And the Romans are confessing,
'English children pass in bloom
  All the prettiest made for blessing.

'*Angli angeli !*' (resumed
  From the mediæval story)
'Such rose angelhoods, emplumed
  In such ringlets of pure glory !'

Can we smooth down the bright hair,
  O my sisters, calm, unthrilled in
Our heart's pulses ? Can we bear
  The sweet looks of our own children,

While those others, lean and small,
  Scurf and mildew of the city,
Spot our streets, convict us all
  Till we take them into pity ?

'Is it our fault ?' you reply,
  'When, throughout civilization,
Every nation's empery
  Is asserted by starvation ?

'All these mouths we cannot feed,
  And we cannot clothe these bodies.'
Well, if man 's so hard indeed,
  Let them learn at least what God is !

Little outcasts from life's fold,
  The grave's hope they may be joined in,
By Christ's covenant consoled
  For our social contract's grinding.

If no better can be done,
  Let us do but this, — endeavor
That the sun behind the sun
  Shine upon them while they shiver !

On the dismal London flags,
  Through the cruel social juggle,
Put a thought beneath their rags
  To ennoble the heart's struggle.

O my sisters, not so much
  Are we asked for — not a blossom
From our children's nosegay, such
  As we gave it from our bosom, —

Not the milk left in their cup,
  Not the lamp while they are sleeping,
Not the little cloak hung up
  While the coat 's in daily keeping, —

But a place in RAGGED SCHOOLS,
  Where the outcasts may to-morrow
Learn by gentle words and rules
  Just the uses of their sorrow.

O my sisters ! children small,
  Blue-eyed, wailing through the city —
Our own babes cry in them all:
  Let us take them into pity.

MAY'S LOVE

I

You love all, you say,
  Round, beneath, above me:
Find me then some way
  Better than to love me,
Me, too, dearest May !

II

O world-kissing eyes
  Which the blue heavens melt to;
I, sad, overwise,
  Loathe the sweet looks dealt to
All things — men and flies.

III

You love all, you say:
  Therefore, Dear, abate me
Just your love, I pray !
  Shut your eyes and hate me —
Only *me* — fair May !

AMY'S CRUELTY

Fair Amy of the terraced house,
  Assist me to discover
Why you who would not hurt a mouse
  Can torture so your lover.

You give your coffee to the cat,
  You stroke the dog for coming,
And all your face grows kinder at
  The little brown bee's humming.

But when *he* haunts your door . . . the town
  Marks coming and marks going . . .
You seem to have stitched your eyelids down
  To that long piece of sewing!

You never give a look, not you,
  Nor drop him a 'Good morning,'
To keep his long day warm and blue,
  So fretted by your scorning.

She shook her head — 'The mouse and bee
  For crumb or flower will linger:
The dog is happy at my knee,
  The cat purrs at my finger.

'But *he* . . . to *him*, the least thing given
  Means great things at a distance;
He wants my world, my sun, my heaven,
  Soul, body, whole existence.

'They say love gives as well as takes;
  But I 'm a simple maiden, —
My mother's first smile when she wakes
  I still have smiled and prayed in.

'I only know my mother's love
  Which gives all and asks nothing;
And this new loving sets the groove
  Too much the way of loathing.

'Unless he gives me all in change,
  I forfeit all things by him:
The risk is terrible and strange —
  I tremble, doubt, . . . deny him.

'He 's sweetest friend or hardest foe,
  Best angel or worst devil;
I either hate or . . . love him so,
  I can't be merely civil!

'You trust a woman who puts forth
  Her blossoms thick as summer's?
You think she dreams what love is worth,
  Who casts it to new-comers?

'Such love 's a cowslip-ball to fling,
  A moment's pretty pastime;
I give . . . all me, if anything,
  The first time and the last time.

'Dear neighbor of the trellised house,
  A man should murmur never,
Though treated worse than dog and mouse,
  Till doated on for ever!'

*MY HEART AND I

I

Enough! we 're tired, my heart and I.
  We sit beside the headstone thus,
  And wish that name were carved for us.
The moss reprints more tenderly
  The hard types of the mason's knife,
  As heaven's sweet life renews earth's life
With which we 're tired, my heart and I.

II

You see we 're tired, my heart and I.
  We dealt with books, we trusted men,
  And in our own blood drenched the pen,
As if such colors could not fly.
  We walked too straight for fortune's end,
  We loved too true to keep a friend;
At last we 're tired, my heart and I.

III

How tired we feel, my heart and I!
  We seem of no use in the world;
  Our fancies hang gray and uncurled
About men's eyes indifferently;
  Our voice which thrilled you so, will let
  You sleep; our tears are only wet:
What do we here, my heart and I?

IV

So tired, so tired, my heart and I!
  It was not thus in that old time
  When Ralph sat with me 'neath the lime
To watch the sunset from the sky.
  'Dear love, you 're looking tired,' he said;
  I, smiling at him, shook my head:
'T is now we 're tired, my heart and I.

V

So tired, so tired, my heart and I!
Though now none takes me on his arm
To fold me close and kiss me warm
Till each quick breath end in a sigh
Of happy languor. Now, alone,
We lean upon this graveyard stone,
Uncheered, unkissed, my heart and I.

VI

Tired out we are, my heart and I.
Suppose the world brought diadems
To tempt us, crusted with loose gems
Of powers and pleasures? Let it try.
We scarcely care to look at even
A pretty child, or God's blue heaven,
We feel so tired, my heart and I.

VII

Yet who complains? My heart and I?
In this abundant earth no doubt
Is little room for things worn out:
Disdain them, break them, throw them by!
And if before the days grew rough
We *once* were loved, used, — well enough,
I think, we 've fared, my heart and I.

THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD

What 's the best thing in the world?
June-rose, by May-dew impearled;
Sweet south-wind, that means no rain;
Truth, not cruel to a friend;
Pleasure, not in haste to end;
Beauty, not self-decked and curled
Till its pride is over-plain;
Light, that never makes you wink;
Memory, that gives no pain;
Love, when, *so*, you 're loved again.
What 's the best thing in the world?
— Something out of it, I think.

WHERE 'S AGNES?

I

Nay, if I had come back so,
And found her dead in her grave,
And if a friend I know
Had said, 'Be strong, nor rave:
She lies there, dead below:

II

'I saw her, I who speak,
White, stiff, the face one blank:
The blue shade came to her cheek
Before they nailed the plank,
For she had been dead a week.'

III

Why, if he had spoken so,
I might have believed the thing,
Although her look, although
Her step, laugh, voice's ring
Lived in me still as they do.

IV

But dead that other way,
Corrupted thus and lost?
That sort of worm in the clay?
I cannot count the cost,
That I should rise and pay.

V

My Agnes false? such shame?
She? Rather be it said
That the pure saint of her name
Has stood there in her stead,
And tricked you to this blame.

VI

Her very gown, her cloak
Fell chastely: no disguise,
But expression! while she broke
With her clear gray morning-eyes
Full upon me and then spoke.

VII

She wore her hair away
From her forehead, — like a cloud
Which a little wind in May
Peels off finely: disallowed
Though bright enough to stay.

VIII

For the heavens must have the place
To themselves, to use and shine in,
As her soul would have her face
To press through upon mine, in
That orb of angel grace.

IX

Had she any fault at all,
'T was having none, I thought too —
There seemed a sort of thrall;
As she felt her shadow ought to
Fall straight upon the wall.

X

Her sweetness strained the sense
Of common life and duty;
And every day's expense
Of moving in such beauty
Required, almost, defence.

XI

What good, I thought, is done
By such sweet things, if any ?
This world smells ill i' the sun
Though the garden-flowers are many,
She is only one.

XII

Can a voice so low and soft
Take open actual part
With Right, — maintain aloft
Pure truth in life or art,
Vexed always, wounded oft ? —

XIII

She fit, with that fair pose
Which melts from curve to curve,
To stand, run, work with those
Who wrestle and deserve,
And speak plain without glose ?

XIV

But I turned round on my fear
Defiant, disagreeing —
What if God has set her here
Less for action than for Being ? —
For the eye and for the ear.

XV

Just to show what beauty may,
Just to prove what music can, —
And then to die away
From the presence of a man,
Who shall learn, henceforth, to pray ?

XVI

As a door, left half ajar
In heaven, would make him think
How heavenly-different are
Things glanced at through the chink,
Till he pined from near to far.

XVII

That door could lead to hell ?
That shining merely meant
Damnation ? What ! She fell
Like a woman, who was sent
Like an angel, by a spell ?

XVIII

She, who scarcely trod the earth,
Turned mere dirt ? My Agnes, — mine !
Called so ! felt of too much worth
To be used so ! too divine
To be breathed near, and so forth !

XIX

Why, I dared not name a sin
In her presence : I went round,
Clipped its name and shut it in
Some mysterious crystal sound, —
Changed the dagger for the pin.

XX

Now you name herself *that word ?*
O my Agnes ! O my saint !
Then the great joys of the Lord
Do not last ? Then all this paint
Runs off nature ? leaves a board ?

XXI

Who 's dead here ? No, not she :
Rather I ! or whence this damp
Cold corruption's misery ?
While my very mourners stamp
Closer in the clods on me.

XXII

And my mouth is full of dust
Till I cannot speak and curse —
Speak and damn him . . . 'Blame 's unjust' ?
Sin blots out the universe,
All because she would and must ?

XXIII

She, my white rose, dropping off
The high rose-tree branch ! and not
That the night-wind blew too rough,
Or the noon-sun burnt too hot,
But, that being a rose — 't was enough !

XXIV

Then henceforth may earth grow trees !
No more roses ! — hard straight lines
To score lies out ! none of these
Fluctuant curves, but firs and pines,
Poplars, cedars, cypresses !

DE PROFUNDIS

It was commonly supposed, at the time of its publication, that the poem 'De Profundis' was called forth by the death of Mrs. Browning's sister Henrietta, — Mrs. Surtees Cook, — which occurred only a few months before her own. In reality it had been written not long after the tragic death by drowning at Torquay, of her brother Edward, on July 11, 1840. The difficulty which Mrs. Browning experienced, for many years, about making any allusion to that sharp calamity, which nearly cost her her own life, doubtless caused her to withhold from publication almost to the last these peculiarly intimate verses.

I

THE face which, duly as the sun,
Rose up for me with life begun,
To mark all bright hours of the day
With hourly love, is dimmed away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

II

The tongue which, like a stream, could run
Smooth music from the roughest stone,
And every morning with 'Good day'
Make each day good, is hushed away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

III

The heart which, like a staff, was one
For mine to lean and rest upon,
The strongest on the longest day
With steadfast love, is caught away, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

IV

And cold before my summer 's done,
And deaf in Nature's general tune,
And fallen too low for special fear,
And here, with hope no longer here, —
While the tears drop, my days go on.

V

The world goes whispering to its own,
'This anguish pierces to the bone;'
And tender friends go sighing round,
'What love can ever cure this wound?'
My days go on, my days go on.

VI

The past rolls forward on the sun
And makes all night. O dreams begun,
Not to be ended! Ended bliss,
And life that will not end in this!
My days go on, my days go on.

VII

Breath freezes on my lips to moan:
As one alone, once not alone,
I sit and knock at Nature's door,
Heart-bare, heart-hungry, very poor,
Whose desolated days go on.

VIII

I knock and cry, — Undone, undone!
Is there no help, no comfort, — none?
No gleaning in the wide wheat-plains
Where others drive their loaded wains?
My vacant days go on, go on.

IX

This Nature, though the snows be down,
Thinks kindly of the bird of June:
The little red hip on the tree
Is ripe for such. What is for me,
Whose days so winterly go on?

X

No bird am I, to sing in June,
And dare not ask an equal boon.
Good nests and berries red are Nature's
To give away to better creatures, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

XI

I ask less kindness to be done, —
Only to loose these pilgrim-shoon,
(Too early worn and grimed) with sweet
Cool deathly touch to these tired feet.
Till days go out which now go on.

XII

Only to lift the turf unmown
From off the earth where it has grown,
Some cubit-space, and say 'Behold,
Creep in, poor Heart, beneath that fold,
Forgetting how the days go on.'

XIII

What harm would that do? Green anon
The sward would quicken, overshone
By skies as blue; and crickets might
Have leave to chirp there day and night
While my new rest went on, went on.

XIV

From gracious Nature have I won
Such liberal bounty? may I run
So, lizard-like, within her side,
And there be safe, who now am tried
By days that painfully go on?

XV

— A Voice reproves me thereupon,
More sweet than Nature's when the drone
Of bees is sweetest, and more deep
Than when the rivers overleap
The shuddering pines, and thunder on.

XVI

God's Voice, not Nature's! Night and noon
He sits upon the great white throne
And listens for the creatures' praise.
What babble we of days and days?
The Day-spring He, whose days go on.

XVII

He reigns above, He reigns alone;
Systems burn out and leave his throne;
Fair mists of seraphs melt and fall
Around Him, changeless amid all, —
Ancient of Days, whose days go on.

XVIII

He reigns below, He reigns alone,
And, having life in love forgone
Beneath the crown of sovran thorns,
He reigns the Jealous God. Who mourns
Or rules with Him, while days go on?

XIX

By anguish which made pale the sun,
I hear Him charge his saints that none
Among his creatures anywhere
Blaspheme against Him with despair,
However darkly days go on.

XX

Take from my head the thorn-wreath brown!
No mortal grief deserves that crown.
O sùpreme Love, chief misery,
The sharp regalia are for THEE
Whose days eternally go on!

XXI

For us, — whatever 's undergone,
Thou knowest, willest what is done.
Grief may be joy misunderstood;
Only the Good discerns the good.
I trust Thee while my days go on.

XXII

Whatever 's lost, it first was won;
We will not struggle nor impugn.
Perhaps the cup was broken here,
That Heaven's new wine might show more clear.
I praise Thee while my days go on.

XXIII

I praise Thee while my days go on;
I love Thee while my days go on:
Through dark and dearth, through fire and frost,
With emptied arms and treasure lost,
I thank Thee while my days go on.

XXIV

And having in thy life-depth thrown
Being and suffering (which are one),
As a child drops his pebble small
Down some deep well, and hears it fall
Smiling — so I. THY DAYS GO ON.

A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

First printed in the *Cornhill Magazine*, July, 1860.

I

WHAT was he doing, the great god Pan,
  Down in the reeds by the river?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
  With the dragon-fly on the river.

II

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
  From the deep cool bed of the river:
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
  Ere he brought it out of the river.

III

High on the shore sat the great god Pan
  While turbidly flowed the river;
And hacked and hewed as a great god can,

With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
Till there was not a sign of the leaf indeed
To prove it fresh from the river.

IV

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
(How tall it stood in the river!)
Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,
Steadily from the outside ring,
And notched the poor dry empty thing
In holes, as he sat by the river.

V

'This is the way,' laughed the great god Pan
(Laughed while he sat by the river),
'The only way, since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed.'
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
He blew in power by the river.

VI

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream on the river.

VII

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain, —
For the reed which grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds in the river.

FIRST NEWS FROM VILLAFRANCA

I

PEACE, peace, peace, do you say?
What! — with the enemy's guns in our ears?
With the country's wrong not rendered back?
What! — while Austria stands at bay
In Mantua, and our Venice bears
The cursed flag of the yellow and black?

II

Peace, peace, peace, do you say?
And this the Mincio? Where's the fleet,
And where's the sea? Are we all blind
Or mad with the blood shed yesterday,
Ignoring Italy under our feet,
And seeing things before, behind?

III

Peace, peace, peace, do you say?
What! — uncontested, undenied?
Because we triumph, we succumb?
A pair of Emperors stand in the way
(One of whom is a man, beside),
To sign and seal our cannons dumb?

IV

No, not Napoleon! — he who mused
At Paris, and at Milan spake,
And at Solferino led the fight:
Not he we trusted, honored, used
Our hopes and hearts for . . . till they break
Even so, you tell us . . . in his sight.

V

Peace, peace, is still your word?
We say you lie then! — that is plain.
There *is* no peace, and shall be none.
Our very Dead would cry 'Absurd!'
And clamor that they died in vain,
And whine to come back to the sun.

VI

Hush! more reverence for the Dead!
They've done the most for Italy
Evermore since the earth was fair.
Now would that *we* had died instead,
Still dreaming peace meant liberty,
And did not, could not, mean despair.

VII

Peace, you say? — yes, peace, in truth!
But such a peace as the ear can achieve
'Twixt the rifle's click and the rush of the ball,
'Twixt the tiger's spring and the crunch of the tooth,
'Twixt the dying atheist's negative
And God's Face — waiting, after all!

KING VICTOR EMANUEL ENTERING FLORENCE, APRIL, 1860

I

King of us all, we cried to thee, cried to thee,
Trampled to earth by the beasts impure,
Dragged by the chariots which shame as they roll:
The dust of our torment far and wide to thee
Went up, dark'ning thy royal soul.
Be witness, Cavour,
That the King was sad for the people in thrall,
This King of us all!

II

King, we cried to thee! Strong in replying,
Thy word and thy sword sprang rapid and sure,
Cleaving our way to a nation's place.
Oh, first soldier of Italy! — crying
Now grateful, exultant, we look in thy face.
Be witness, Cavour,
That, freedom's first soldier, the freed should call
First King of them all!

III

This is our beautiful Italy's birthday;
High-thoughted souls, whether many or fewer,
Bring her the gift, and wish her the good,
While Heaven presents on this sunny earthday
The noble King to the land renewed:
Be witness, Cavour!
Roar, cannon-mouths! Proclaim, install
The King of us all!

IV

Grave he rides through the Florence gateway,
Clenching his face into calm, to immure
His struggling heart till it half disappears;
If he relaxed for a moment, straightway
He would break out into passionate tears —
(Be witness, Cavour!)
While rings the cry without interval,
'Live, King of us all!'

V

Cry, free peoples! Honor the nation
By crowning the true man — and none is truer:
Pisa is here, and Livorno is here,
And thousands of faces, in wild exultation,
Burn over the windows to feel him near —
(Be witness, Cavour!)
Burn over from terrace, roof, window and wall,
On this King of us all.

VI

Grave! A good man 's ever the graver
For bearing a nation's trust secure;
And *he*, he thinks of the Heart, beside,
Which broke for Italy, failing to save her,
And pining away by Oporto's tide:
Be witness, Cavour,
That he thinks of his vow on that royal pall,
This King of us all.

VII

Flowers, flowers, from the flowery city!
Such innocent thanks for a deed so pure,
As, melting away for joy into flowers,
The nation invites him to enter his Pitti
And evermore reign in this Florence of ours.
Be witness, Cavour!
He 'll stand where the reptiles were used to crawl,
This King of us all.

VIII

Grave, as the manner of noble men is —
Deeds unfinished will weigh on the doer:
And, baring his head to those crape-veiled flags,
He bows to the grief of the South and Venice.
Oh, riddle the last of the yellow to rags,
And swear by Cavour
That the King shall reign where the tyrants fall,
True King of us all!

THE SWORD OF CASTRUCCIO CASTRACANI

'Questa è per me.' — KING VICTOR EMANUEL.

I

WHEN Victor Emanuel the King
  Went down to his Lucca that day,
The people, each vaunting the thing
  As he gave it, gave all things away,—
  In a burst of fierce gratitude, say,
As they tore out their hearts for the King.

II

— Gave the green forest-walk on the wall,
  With the Apennine blue through the trees;
Gave the palaces, churches, and all
  The great pictures which burn out of these;
  But the eyes of the King seemed to freeze
As he gazed upon ceiling and wall.

III

'Good,' said the King as he passed.
  Was he cold to the arts? — or else coy
To possession? or crossed, at the last
  (Whispered some), by the vote in Savoy?
  Shout! Love him enough for his joy!
'Good,' said the King as he passed.

IV

He, travelling the whole day through flowers
  And protesting amenities, found
At Pistoia, betwixt the two showers
  Of red roses, the 'Orphans' (renowned
  As the heirs of Puccini) who wound
With a sword through the crowd and the flowers.

V

''T is the sword of Castruccio, O King,—
  In that strife of intestinal hate,
Very famous! Accept what we bring,
  We who cannot be sons, by our fate,
  Rendered citizens by thee of late,
And endowed with a country and king.

VI

'Read! Puccini has willed that this sword
  (Which once made in an ignorant feud
Many orphans) remain in our ward
  Till some patriot its pure civic blood
  Wipe away in the foe's and make good,
In delivering the land by the sword.'

VII

Then the King exclaimed 'This is for *me!*'
  And he dashed out his hand on the hilt,
While his blue eye shot fire openly,
  And his heart overboiled till it spilt
  A hot prayer, — 'God! the rest as Thou wilt!
But grant me this! — *This* is for *me.*'

VIII

O Victor Emanuel, the King,
  The sword is for *thee*, and the deed,
And nought for the alien, next spring,
  Nought for Hapsburg and Bourbon agreed —
  But, for us, a great Italy freed,
With a hero to head us, — our King!

SUMMING UP IN ITALY

(INSCRIBED TO INTELLIGENT PUBLICS OUT OF IT)

I

OBSERVE how it will be at last,
  When our Italy stands at full stature,
A year ago tied down so fast
  That the cord cut the quick of her nature!
You 'll honor the deed and its scope,
  Then, in logical sequence upon it,
Will use up the remnants of rope
  By hanging the men who have done it.

II

The speech in the Commons, which hits you
  A sketch off, how dungeons must feel, —
The official despatch, which commits you
  From stamping out groans with your heel, —
Suggestions in journal or book for
  Good efforts, — are praised as is meet:
But what in this world can men look for,
  Who only achieve and complete?

III

True, you 've praise for the fireman who sets his
  Brave face to the axe of the flame,

Disappears in the smoke, and then fetches
A babe down, or idiot that 's lame, —
For the boor even, who rescues through pity
A sheep from the brute who would kick it:
But saviours of nations ! — 't is pretty,
And doubtful: they *may* be so wicked :

IV

Azeglio, Farini, Mamiani,
Ricasoli, — doubt by the dozen ! — here 's
Pepoli too, and Cipriani,
Imperial cousins and cozeners —
Arese, Laiatico, — courtly
Of manners, if stringent of mouth:
Garibaldi ! we 'll come to him shortly
(As soon as he *ends* in the South).

V

Napoleon — as strong as ten armies,
Corrupt as seven devils — a fact
You accede to, then seek where the harm is
Drained off from the man to his act,
And find — a free nation ! Suppose
Some hell-brood in Eden's sweet greenery,
Convoked for creating — a rose !
Would it suit the infernal machinery ?

VI

Cavour, — to the despot's desire,
Who his own thought so craftily marries —
What is he but just a thin wire
For conducting the lightning from Paris ?
Yes, write down the two as compeers,
Confessing (you would not permit a lie)
He bore up his Piedmont ten years
Till she suddenly smiled and was Italy.

VII

And the King, with that 'stain on his scutcheon,'
Savoy — as the calumny runs;
(If it be not his blood, — with his clutch on
The sword, and his face to the guns.)
O first, where the battle-storm gathers,
O loyal of heart on the throne,
Let those keep the 'graves of their fathers'
Who quail, in a nerve, from their own !

VIII

For *thee* — through the dim Hades-portal
The dream of a voice — 'Blessed thou
Who hast made all thy race twice immortal !
No need of the sepulchres now !
— Left to Bourbons and Hapsburgs, who fester
Above-ground with worm-eaten souls,
While the ghost of some pale feudal jester
Before them strews treaties in holes.'

IX

But hush ! — am I dreaming a poem
Of Hades, Heaven, Justice ? Not I;
I began too far off, in my proem,
With what men believe and deny:
And on earth, whatsoever the need is
(To sum up as thoughtful reviewers),
The moral of every great deed is —
The virtue of slandering the doers.

'DIED . . .'

(*The Times* Obituary)

I

What shall we add now ? He is dead.
And I who praise and you who blame,
With wash of words across his name,
Find suddenly declared instead —
'*On Sunday, third of August, dead.*'

II

Which stops the whole we talked to-day.
I, quickened to a plausive glance
At his large general tolerance
By common people's narrow way,
Stopped short in praising. Dead, they say.

III

And you, who had just put in a sort
Of cold deduction — 'rather, large
Through weakness of the continent marge,
Than greatness of the thing contained' —
Broke off. 'Dead ! — there, you stood restrained.

IV

As if we had talked in following one
Up some long gallery. 'Would you choose
An air like that? The gait is loose —
Or noble.' Sudden in the sun
An oubliette winks. Where *is* he? Gone.

V

Dead. Man's 'I was' by God's 'I am' —
All hero-worship comes to that.
High heart, high thought, high fame, as flat
As a gravestone. Bring your *Jacet jam* —
The epitaph 's an epigram.

VI

Dead. There 's an answer to arrest
All carping. Dust 's his natural place?
He 'll let the flies buzz round his face
And, though you slander, not protest?
— From such an one, exact the Best?

VII

Opinions gold or brass are null.
We chuck our flattery or abuse,
Called Cæsar's due, as Charon's dues,
I' the teeth of some dead sage or fool,
To mend the grinning of a skull.

VIII

Be abstinent in praise and blame.
The man 's still mortal, who stands first,
And mortal only, if last and worst.
Then slowly lift so frail a fame,
Or softly drop so poor a shame.

THE FORCED RECRUIT

Solferino, 1859

First printed in the *Cornhill Magazine*, October, 1860.

In the ranks of the Austrian you found him,
He died with his face to you all;
Yet bury him here where around him
You honor your bravest that fall.

Venetian, fair-featured and slender,
He lies shot to death in his youth,
With a smile on his lips over-tender
For any mere soldier's dead mouth.

No stranger, and yet not a traitor,
Though alien the cloth on his breast,
Underneath it how seldom a greater
Young heart has a shot sent to rest!

By your enemy tortured and goaded
To march with them, stand in their file,
His musket (see) never was loaded,
He facing your guns with that smile!

As orphans yearn on to their mothers,
He yearned to your patriot bands; —
'Let me die for our Italy, brothers,
If not in your ranks, by your hands!

'Aim straightly, fire steadily! spare me
A ball in the body which may
Deliver my heart here, and tear me
This badge of the Austrian away!'

So thought he, so died he this morning.
What then? many others have died.
Ay, but easy for men to die scorning
The death-stroke, who fought side by side —

One tricolor floating above them;
Struck down 'mid triumphant acclaims
Of an Italy rescued to love them
And blazon the brass with their names.

But he, — without witness or honor,
Mixed, shamed in his country's regard,
With the tyrants who march in upon her,
Died faithful and passive: 't was hard.

'T was sublime. In a cruel restriction
Cut off from the guerdon of sons,
With most filial obedience, conviction,
His soul kissed the lips of her guns.

That moves you? Nay, grudge not to show it,
While digging a grave for him here:
The others who died, says your poet,
Have glory, — let *him* have a tear.

GARIBALDI

I

He bent his head upon his breast
Wherein his lion-heart lay sick: —

'Perhaps we are not ill-repaid;
Perhaps this is not a true test;
Perhaps this was not a foul trick;
Perhaps none wronged, and none betrayed.

II

'Perhaps the people's vote which here
United, there may disunite,
And both be lawful as they think;
Perhaps a patriot statesman, dear
For chartering nations, can with right
Disfranchise those who hold the ink.

III

'Perhaps men's wisdom is not craft;
Men's greatness, not a selfish greed;
Men's justice, not the safer side;
Perhaps even women, when they laughed,
Wept, thanked us that the land was freed,
Not wholly (though they kissed us) lied.

IV

'Perhaps no more than this we meant,
When up at Austria's guns we flew,
And quenched them with a cry apiece,
Italia! — Yet a dream was sent . . .
The little house my father knew,
The olives and the palms of Nice.'

V

He paused, and drew his sword out slow,
Then pored upon the blade intent,
As if to read some written thing;
While many murmured, — 'He will go
In that despairing sentiment
And break his sword before the King.'

VI

He poring still upon the blade,
His large lid quivered, something fell.
'Perhaps,' he said, 'I was not born
With such fine brains to treat and trade, —
And if a woman knew it well,
Her falsehood only meant her scorn.

VII

'Yet through Varese's cannon-smoke
My eye saw clear: men feared this man
At Como, where this sword could seal
Death's protocol with every stroke:
And now . . . the drop there scarcely can
Impair the keenness of the steel.

VIII

'So man and sword may have their use;
And if the soil beneath my foot
In valor's act is forfeited,
I'll strike the harder, take my dues
Out nobler, and all loss confute
From ampler heavens above my head.

IX

'My King, King Victor, I am thine!
So much Nice-dust as what I am
(To make our Italy) must cleave.
Forgive that.' Forward with a sign
He went.
You 've seen the telegram?
Palermo 's taken, we believe.

ONLY A CURL

I

Friends of faces unknown and a land
Unvisited over the sea,
Who tell me how lonely you stand
With a single gold curl in the hand
Held up to be looked at by me, —

II

While you ask me to ponder and say
What a father and mother can do,
With the bright fellow-locks put away
Out of reach, beyond kiss, in the clay
Where the violets press nearer than you

III

Shall I speak like a poet, or run
Into weak woman's tears for relief?
Oh, children! — I never lost one, —
Yet my arm 's round my own little son,
And Love knows the secret of Grief.

IV

And I feel what it must be and is,
When God draws a new angel so
Through the house of a man up to his,
With a murmur of music you miss,
And a rapture of light you forgo.

V

How you think, staring on at the door,
Where the face of your angel flashed in,

That its brightness, familiar before,
Burns off from you ever the more
For the dark of your sorrow and sin.

VI

'God lent him and takes him,' you sigh;
— Nay, there let me break with your pain:
God 's generous in giving, say I, —
And the thing which He gives, I deny
That He ever can take back again.

VII

He gives what He gives. I appeal
To all who bear babes — in the hour
When the veil of the body we feel
Rent round us, — while torments reveal
The motherhood's advent in power,

VIII

And the babe cries! — has each of us known
By apocalypse (God being there
Full in nature) the child is our own,
Life of life, love of love, moan of moan,
Through all changes, all times, everywhere.

IX

He 's ours and for ever. Believe,
O father! — O mother, look back
To the first love's assurance! To give
Means with God not to tempt or deceive
With a cup thrust in Benjamin's sack.

X

He gives what He gives. Be content!
He resumes nothing given, — be sure!
God lend? Where the usurers lent
In his temple, indignant He went
And scourged away all those impure.

XI

He lends not; but gives to the end,
As He loves to the end. If it seem
That He draws back a gift, comprehend
'T is to add to it rather, — amend,
And finish it up to your dream, —

XII

Or keep, — as a mother will toys
Too costly, though given by herself,
Till the room shall be stiller from noise,
And the children more fit for such joys,
Kept over their heads on the shelf.

XIII

So look up, friends! you, who indeed
Have possessed in your house a sweet piece
Of the Heaven which men strive for, must need
Be more earnest than others are, — speed
Where they loiter, persist where they cease.

XIV

You know how one angel smiles there:
Then weep not. 'T is easy for you
To be drawn by a single gold hair
Of that curl, from earth's storm and despair,
To the safe place above us. Adieu.

A VIEW ACROSS THE ROMAN CAMPAGNA

1861

I

Over the dumb Campagna-sea,
Out in the offing through mist and rain,
Saint Peter's Church heaves silently
Like a mighty ship in pain,
Facing the tempest with struggle and strain.

II

Motionless waifs of ruined towers,
Soundless breakers of desolate land:
The sullen surf of the mist devours
That mountain-range upon either hand,
Eaten away from its outline grand.

III

And over the dumb Campagna-sea
Where the ship of the Church heaves on to wreck,
Alone and silent as God must be,
The Christ walks. Ay, but Peter's neck
Is stiff to turn on the foundering deck.

IV

Peter, Peter! if such be thy name,
Now leave the ship for another to steer,
And proving thy faith evermore the same,

Come forth, tread out through the dark and drear,
Since He who walks on the sea is here.

V

Peter, Peter! He does not speak;
He is not as rash as in old Galilee:
Safer a ship, though it toss and leak,
Than a reeling foot on a rolling sea!
And he 's got to be round in the girth, thinks he.

VI

Peter, Peter! He does not stir;
His nets are heavy with silver fish;
He reckons his gains, and is keen to infer
—'The broil on the shore, if the Lord should wish;
But the sturgeon goes to the Cæsar's dish.'

VII

Peter, Peter! thou fisher of men,
Fisher of fish wouldst thou live instead?
Haggling for pence with the other Ten,
Cheating the market at so much a head,
Griping the Bag of the traitor Dead?

VIII

At the triple crow of the Gallic cock
Thou weep'st not, thou, though thine eyes be dazed:
What bird comes next in the tempest-shock?
—Vultures! see,—as when Romulus gazed,—
To inaugurate Rome for a world amazed!

THE KING'S GIFT

I

TERESA, ah, Teresita!
Now what has the messenger brought her,
Our Garibaldi's young daughter,
To make her stop short in her singing?
Will she not once more repeat a
Verse from that hymn of our hero's,
Setting the souls of us ringing?
Break off the song where the tear rose?
Ah, Teresita!

II

A young thing, mark, is Teresa:
Her eyes have caught fire, to be sure, in
That necklace of jewels from Turin,
Till blind their regard to us men is.
But still she remembers to raise a
Sly look to her father, and note—
'Could she sing on as well about Venice,
Yet wear such a flame at her throat?
Decide for Teresa.'

III

Teresa, ah, Teresita!
His right hand has paused on her head—
'Accept it, my daughter,' he said;
'Ay, wear it, true child of thy mother!
Then sing, till all start to their feet, a
New verse ever bolder and freer!
King Victor 's no king like another,
But verily noble as *we* are,
Child, Teresita!'

PARTING LOVERS

SIENA, 1860

I

I LOVE thee, love thee, Giulio;
Some call me cold, and some demure;
And if thou hast ever guessed that so
I loved thee . . . well, the proof was poor
And no one could be sure.

II

Before thy song (with shifted rhymes
To suit my name) did I undo
The persian? If it stirred sometimes,
Thou hast not seen a hand push through
A foolish flower or two.

III

My mother listening to my sleep,
Heard nothing but a sigh at night,—
The short sigh rippling on the deep,
When hearts run out of breath and sight
Of men, to God's clear light.

IV

When others named thee,—thought thy brows
Were straight, thy smile was tender—'Here

He comes between the vineyard-rows!'
I said not 'Ay,' nor waited, Dear,
To feel thee step too near.

V

I left such things to bolder girls, —
Olivia or Clotilda. Nay,
When that Clotilda, through her curls,
Held both thine eyes in hers one day,
I marvelled, let me say.

VI

I could not try the woman's trick:
Between us straightway fell the blush
Which kept me separate, blind and sick.
A wind came with thee in a flush,
As blown through Sinai's bush.

VII

But now that Italy invokes
Her young men to go forth and chase
The foe or perish, — nothing chokes
My voice, or drives me from the place.
I look thee in the face.

VIII

I love thee! It is understood,
Confest: I do not shrink or start.
No blushes! all my body's blood
Has gone to greaten this poor heart.
That, loving, we may part.

IX

Our Italy invokes the youth
To die if need be. Still there's room,
Though earth is strained with dead in truth:
Since twice the lilies were in bloom
They have not grudged a tomb.

X

And many a plighted maid and wife
And mother, who can say since then
'My country,' — cannot say through life
'My son,' 'my spouse,' 'my flower of men,'
And not weep dumb again.

XI

Heroic males the country bears, —
But daughters give up more than sons:
Flags wave, drums beat, and unawares
You flash your souls out with the guns,
And take your Heaven at once.

XII

But we! — we empty heart and home
Of life's life, love! We bear to think
You're gone, — to feel you may not come, —
To hear the door-latch stir and clink,
Yet no more you! . . . nor sink.

XIII

Dear God! when Italy is one,
Complete, content from bound to bound,
Suppose, for my share, earth's undone
By one grave in 't — as one small wound
Will kill a man, 't is found.

XIV

What then? If love's delight must end,
At least we'll clear its truth from flaws.
I love thee, love thee, sweetest friend!
Now take my sweetest without pause,
And help the nation's cause.

XV

And thus, of noble Italy
We'll both be worthy! Let her show
The future how we made her free,
Not sparing life . . . nor Giulio,
Nor this . . . this heartbreak! Go.

MOTHER AND POET

Turin, after News from Gaeta, 1861

The mother was Laura Savio of Turin, both poet and patriot, whose two sons were killed at Ancona and Gaeta.

I

Dead! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
Dead! both my boys! When you sit at the feast
And are wanting a great song for Italy free,
Let none look at *me!*

II

Yet I was a poetess only last year,
And good at my art, for a woman, men said;

But *this* woman, *this*, who is agonized here,
— The east sea and west sea rhyme on in her head
For ever instead.

III

What art can a woman be good at? Oh, vain!
What art *is* she good at, but hurting her breast
With the milk-teeth of babes, and a smile at the pain?
Ah boys, how you hurt! you were strong as you pressed,
And I proud, by that test.

IV

What art's for a woman? To hold on her knees
Both darlings! to feel all their arms round her throat,
Cling, strangle a little! to sew by degrees
And 'broider the long-clothes and neat little coat;
To dream and to doat.

V

To teach them . . . It stings there! *I* made them indeed
Speak plain the word *country*. *I* taught them, no doubt,
That a country's a thing men should die for at need.
I prated of liberty, rights, and about
The tyrant cast out.

VI

And when their eyes flashed . . . O my beautiful eyes! . . .
I exulted; nay, let them go forth at the wheels
Of the guns, and denied not. But then the surprise
When one sits quite alone! Then one weeps, then one kneels!
God, how the house feels!

VII

At first, happy news came, in gay letters moiled
With my kisses, — of camp-life and glory, and how
They both loved me; and, soon coming home to be spoiled
In return would fan off every fly from my brow
With their green laurel-bough.

VIII

Then was triumph at Turin: 'Ancona was free!'
And some one came out of the cheers in the street,
With a face pale as stone, to say something to me.
My Guido was dead! I fell down at his feet,
While they cheered in the street.

IX

I bore it; friends soothed me; my grief looked sublime
As the ransom of Italy. One boy remained
To be leant on and walked with, recalling the time
When the first grew immortal, while both of us strained
To the height he had gained.

X

And letters still came, shorter, sadder, more strong,
Writ now but in one hand, 'I was not to faint, —
One loved me for two — would be with me ere long:
And *Viva l' Italia! — he* died for, our saint,
Who forbids our complaint.'

XI

My Nanni would add, 'he was safe, and aware
Of a presence that turned off the balls, — was imprest
It was Guido himself, who knew what I could bear,
And how 't was impossible, quite dispossessed
To live on for the rest.'

XII

On which, without pause, up the telegraph-line
Swept smoothly the next news from Gaeta: — *Shot.*
Tell his mother. Ah, ah, 'his,' 'their' mother, — not 'mine,'

No voice says '*My* mother' again to me. What!
You think Guido forgot?

XIII

Are souls straight so happy that, dizzy with Heaven,
They drop earth's affections, conceive not of woe?
I think not. Themselves were too lately forgiven
Through THAT Love and Sorrow which reconciled so
The Above and Below.

XIV

O Christ of the five wounds, who look'dst through the dark
To the face of thy mother! consider, I pray,
How we common mothers stand desolate, mark,
Whose sons, not being Christs, die with eyes turned away,
And no last word to say!

XV

Both boys dead? but that's out of nature. We all
Have been patriots, yet each house must always keep one.
'T were imbecile, hewing out roads to a wall;
And, when Italy's made, for what end is it done
If we have not a son?

XVI

Ah, ah, ah! when Gaeta's taken, what then?
When the fair wicked queen sits no more at her sport
Of the fire-balls of death crashing souls out of men?
When the guns of Cavalli with final retort
Have cut the game short?

XVII

When Venice and Rome keep their new jubilee,
When your flag takes all heaven for its white, green, and red,
When *you* have your country from mountain to sea,
When King Victor has Italy's crown on his head,
(And *I* have my Dead) —

XVIII

What then? Do not mock me. Ah, ring your bells low,
And burn your lights faintly! *My* country is *there*,
Above the star pricked by the last peak of snow:
My Italy's THERE, with my brave civic Pair,
To disfranchise despair!

XIX

Forgive me. Some women bear children in strength,
And bite back the cry of their pain in self-scorn;
But the birth-pangs of nations will wring us at length
Into wail such as this — and we sit on forlorn
When the man-child is born.

XX

Dead! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
Both! both my boys! If in keeping the feast
You want a great song for your Italy free,
Let none look at *me!*

NATURE'S REMORSES

ROME, 1861

I

HER soul was bred by a throne, and fed
From the sucking-bottle used in her race
On starch and water (for mother's milk
Which gives a larger growth instead),
And, out of the natural liberal grace,
Was swaddled away in violet silk.

II

And young and kind, and royally blind,
Forth she stepped from her palace-door

On three-piled carpet of compliments,
Curtains of incense drawn by the wind
In between her for evermore
And daylight issues of events.

III

On she drew, as a queen might do,
To meet a Dream of Italy, —
Of magical town and musical wave,
Where even a god, his amulet blue
Of shining sea, in an ecstasy
Dropt and forgot in a Nereid's cave.

IV

Down she goes, as the soft wind blows,
To live more smoothly than mortals can,
To love and to reign as queen and wife,
To wear a crown that smells of a rose,
And still, with a sceptre as light as a fan,
Beat sweet time to the song of life.

V

What is this? As quick as a kiss
Falls the smile from her girlish mouth!
The lion-people has left its lair,
Roaring along her garden of bliss,
And the fiery underworld of the South
Scorched a way to the upper air.

VI

And a fire-stone ran in the form of a man,
Burningly, boundingly, fatal and fell,
Bowling the kingdom down! Where was the King?
She had heard somewhat, since life began,
Of terrors on earth and horrors in hell,
But never, never of such a thing.

VII

You think she dropped when her dream was stopped,
When the blotch of Bourbon blood inlay,
Lividly rank, her new lord's cheek?
Not so. Her high heart overtopped
The royal part she had come to play.
Only the men in that hour were weak.

VIII

And twice a wife by her ravaged life,
And twice a queen by her kingdom lost,
She braved the shock and the counter-shock
Of hero and traitor, bullet and knife,
While Italy pushed, like a vengeful ghost,
That son of the Cursed from Gaeta's rock.

IX

What will ye give her, who could not deliver,
German Princesses? A laurel-wreath
All over-scored with your signatures,
Graces, Serenities, Highnesses ever?
Mock her not, fresh from the truth of Death,
Conscious of dignities higher than yours.

X

What will ye put in your casket shut,
Ladies of Paris, in sympathy's name?
Guizot's daughter, what have you brought her?
Withered immortelles, long ago cut
For guilty dynasties perished in shame,
Putrid to memory, Guizot's daughter?

XI

Ah poor queen! so young and serene!
What shall we do for her, now hope 's done,
Standing at Rome in these ruins old,
She too a ruin and no more a queen?
Leave her that diadem made by the sun
Turning her hair to an innocent gold.

XII

Ay! bring close to her, as 't were a rose, to her,
Yon free child from an Apennine city
Singing for Italy, — dumb in the place!
Something like solace, let us suppose, to her
Given, in that homage of wonder and pity,
By his pure eyes to her beautiful face.

XIII

Nature, excluded, savagely brooded;
Ruined all queendom and dogmas of state:
Then, in reaction remorseful and mild,
Rescues the womanhood, nearly eluded,
Shows her what 's sweetest in womanly fate —
Sunshine from Heaven, and the eyes of a child.

THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH

THE LAST POEM

ROME, MAY, 1861

The occasion of Mrs. Browning's last poem was a visit of the Danish novelist Hans Christian Andersen to Rome in the spring of 1861.

I

'Now give us lands where the olives grow,'
Cried the North to the South,
'Where the sun with a golden mouth can blow
Blue bubbles of grapes down a vineyard-row!'
Cried the North to the South.

'Now give us men from the sunless plain,'
Cried the South to the North,
'By need of work in the snow and the rain,
Made strong, and brave by familiar pain!'
Cried the South to the North.

II

'Give lucider hills and intenser seas,'
Said the North to the South.
'Since ever by symbols and bright degrees
Art, childlike, climbs to the dear Lord's knees,'
Said the North to the South.

'Give strenuous souls for belief and prayer,'
Said the South to the North,
'That stand in the dark on the lowest stair,
While affirming of God, "He is certainly there,"'
Said the South to the North.

III

'Yet oh for the skies that are softer and higher!'
Sighed the North to the South;
For the flowers that blaze, and the trees that aspire,
And the insects made of a song or a fire!'
Sighed the North to the South.

'And oh for a seer to discern the same!'
Sighed the South to the North;
'For a poet's tongue of baptismal flame,
To call the tree or the flower by its name!'
Sighed the South to the North.

IV

The North sent therefore a man of men
As a grace to the South;
And thus to Rome came Andersen.
—'*Alas, but must you take him again?*'
Said the South to the North.

TRANSLATIONS

PROMETHEUS BOUND

The translation which follows of the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus is the revised version first published by Mrs. Browning among the *Poems of 1850*. She herself called it a retranslation rather than a revision, and was very severe in her own strictures on the earlier version which had been published without her name, along with a few occasional pieces in 1833. The present is undoubtedly a much better piece of work than the ambitious first attempt, which the author wished to have it entirely supersede. Yet a certain special interest will always attach to the previous rendering as having been the one which Robert and Elizabeth Browning discussed so fully in some of the earlier letters of their famous correspondence. (Vide *Letters of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, vol. i. pp. 34–46.)

PERSONS

PROMETHEUS.
OCEANUS.
HERMES.
HEPHÆSTUS.
IO, *daughter of* Inachus.
STRENGTH *and* FORCE.
Chorus of Sea Nymphs.

SCENE.—STRENGTH *and* FORCE, HEPHÆSTUS *and* PROMETHEUS, *at the Rocks.*

Strength. We reach the utmost limit of the earth,
The Scythian track, the desert without man.
And now, Hephæstus, thou must needs fulfil
The mandate of our Father, and with links
Indissoluble of adamantine chains
Fasten against this beetling precipice
This guilty god. Because he filched away

Thine own bright flower, the glory of plastic fire,
And gifted mortals with it, — such a sin
It doth behove he expiate to the gods,
Learning to accept the empery of Zeus
And leave off his old trick of loving man.
Hephæstus. O Strength and Force, for you, our Zeus's will
Presents a deed for doing, no more! — but *I*,
I lack your daring, up this storm-rent chasm
To fix with violent hands a kindred god,
Howbeit necessity compels me so
That I must dare it, and our Zeus commands
With a most inevitable word. Ho, thou!
High-thoughted son of Themis who is sage!
Thee loth, I loth must rivet fast in chains
Against this rocky height unclomb by man,
Where never human voice nor face shall find
Out thee who lov'st them, and thy beauty's flower,
Scorched in the sun's clear heat, shall fade away.
Night shall come up with garniture of stars
To comfort thee with shadow, and the sun
Disperse with retrickt beams the morning-frosts.
But through all changes sense of present woe
Shall vex thee sore, because with none of them
There comes a hand to free. Such fruit is plucked
From love of man! and in that thou, a god,
Didst brave the wrath of gods and give away
Undue respect to mortals, for that crime
Thou art adjudged to guard this joyless rock,
Erect, unslumbering, bending not the knee,
And many a cry and unavailing moan
To utter on the air. For Zeus is stern,
And new-made kings are cruel.
Strength. Be it so.
Why loiter in vain pity? Why not hate
A god the gods hate? one too who betrayed
Thy glory unto men?
Hephæstus. An awful thing
Is kinship joined to friendship.
Strength. Grant it be;
Is disobedience to the Father's word
A possible thing? Dost quail not more for that?
Hephæstus. Thou, at least, art a stern one: ever bold.
Strength. Why, if I wept, it were no remedy;
And do not *thou* spend labor on the air
To bootless uses.
Hephæstus. Cursed handicraft!
I curse and hate thee, O my craft!
Strength. Why hate
Thy craft most plainly innocent of all
These pending ills?
Hephæstus. I would some other hand
Were here to work it!
Strength. All work hath its pain,
Except to rule the gods. There is none free
Except King Zeus.
Hephæstus. I know it very well:
I argue not against it.
Strength. Why not, then,
Make haste and lock the fetters over HIM
Lest Zeus behold thee lagging?
Hephæstus. Here be chains.
Zeus may behold these.
Strength. Seize him: strike amain:
Strike with the hammer on each side his hands —
Rivet him to the rock.
Hephæstus. The work is done,
And thoroughly done.
Strength. Still faster grapple him;
Wedge him in deeper: leave no inch to stir.
He 's terrible for finding a way out
From the irremediable.
Hephæstus. Here 's an arm, at least,
Grappled past freeing.
Strength. Now then, buckle me
The other securely. Let this wise one learn
He 's duller than our Zeus.
Hephæstus. Oh, none but he
Accuse me justly.
Strength. Now, straight through the chest,
Take him and bite him with the clenching tooth
Of the adamantine wedge, and rivet him.
Hephæstus. Alas, Prometheus, what thou sufferest here
I sorrow over.
Strength. Dost thou flinch again

And breathe groans for the enemies of Zeus ?
Beware lest thine own pity find thee out.
Hephæstus. Thou dost behold a spectacle that turns
The sight o' the eyes to pity.
Strength. I behold
A sinner suffer his sin's penalty.
But lash the thongs about his sides.
Hephæstus. So much,
I must do. Urge no farther than I must.
Strength. Ay, but I *will* urge ! — and, with shout on shout,
Will hound thee at this quarry. Get thee down
And ring amain the iron round his legs.
Hephæstus. That work was not long doing.
Strength. Heavily now
Let fall the strokes upon the perforant gyves:
For He who rates the work has a heavy hand.
Hephæstus. Thy speech is savage as thy shape.
Strength. Be thou
Gentle and tender ! but revile not me
For the firm will and the untruckling hate.
Hephæstus. Let us go. He is netted round with chains.
Strength. Here, now, taunt on ! and having spoiled the gods
Of honors, crown withal thy mortal men
Who live a whole day out. Why how could *they*
Draw off from thee one single of thy griefs ?
Methinks the Dæmons gave thee a wrong name,
'Prometheus,' which means Providence, — because
Thou dost thyself need providence to see
Thy roll and ruin from the top of doom.
Prometheus (*alone*). O holy Æther, and swift-wingèd Winds,
And River-wells, and laughter innumerous
Of yon sea-waves ! Earth, mother of us all,
And all-viewing cyclic Sun, I cry on you, —
Behold me, a god, what I endure from gods !
Behold, with throe on throe,
How, wasted by this woe,
I wrestle down the myriad years of time !
Behold, how fast around me,
The new King of the happy ones sublime
Has flung the chain he forged, has shamed and bound me !
Woe, woe ! to-day's woe and the coming morrow's
I cover with one groan. And where is found me
A limit to these sorrows ?
And yet what word do I say ? I have foreknown
Clearly all things that should be ; nothing done
Comes sudden to my soul ; and I must bear
What is ordained with patience, being aware
Necessity doth front the universe
With an invincible gesture. Yet this curse
Which strikes me now, I find it hard to brave
In silence or in speech. Because I gave
Honor to mortals, I have yoked my soul
To this compelling fate. Because I stole
The secret fount of fire, whose bubbles went
Over the ferule's brim, and manward sent
Art's mighty means and perfect rudiment,
That sin I expiate in this agony,
Hung here in fetters, 'neath the blanching sky.
Ah, ah me ! what a sound,
What a fragrance sweeps up from a pinion unseen
Of a god, or a mortal, or nature between,
Sweeping up to this rock where the earth has her bound,
To have sight of my pangs or some guerdon obtain.
Lo, a god in the anguish, a god in the chain !
The god, Zeus hateth sore
And his gods hate again,
As many as tread on his glorified floor,
Because I loved mortals too much evermore.
Alas me ! what a murmur and motion I hear,
As of birds flying near !
And the air undersings
The light stroke of their wings —
And all life that approaches I wait for in fear.

Chorus of Sea Nymphs, 1st Strophe.

Fear nothing! our troop
Floats lovingly up
With a quick-oaring stroke
Of wings steered to the rock,
Having softened the soul of our father below.
For the gales of swift-bearing have sent me a sound,
And the clank of the iron, the malleted blow,
Smote down the profound
Of my caverns of old,
And struck the red light in a blush from my brow, —
Till I sprang up unsandalled, in haste to behold,
And rushed forth on my chariot of wings manifold.

Prometheus. Alas me! — alas me!
Ye offspring of Tethys who bore at her breast
Many children, and eke of Oceanus, he
Coiling still around earth with perpetual unrest!
Behold me and see
How transfixed with the fang
Of a fetter I hang
On the high-jutting rocks of this fissure and keep
An uncoveted watch o'er the world and the deep.

Chorus, 1st Antistrophe.

I behold thee, Prometheus; yet now, yet now,
A terrible cloud whose rain is tears
Sweeps over mine eyes that witness how
Thy body appears
Hung awaste on the rocks by infrangible chains:
For new is the Hand, new the rudder that steers
The ship of Olympus through surge and wind —
And of old things passed, no track is behind.

Prometheus. Under earth, under Hades
Where the home of the shade is,
All into the deep, deep Tartarus,
I would he had hurled me adown.
I would he had plunged me, fastened thus
In the knotted chain with the savage clang,
All into the dark where there should be none,
Neither god nor another, to laugh and see.
But now the winds sing through and shake
The hurtling chains wherein I hang,
And I, in my naked sorrows, make
Much mirth for my enemy.

Chorus, 2d Strophe.

Nay! who of the gods hath a heart so stern
As to use thy woe for a mock and mirth?
Who would not turn more mild to learn
Thy sorrows? who of the heaven and earth
Save Zeus? But he
Right wrathfully
Bears on his sceptral soul unbent
And rules thereby the heavenly seed,
Nor will he pause till he content
His thirsty heart in a finished deed;
Or till Another shall appear,
To win by fraud, to seize by fear
The hard-to-be-captured government.

Prometheus. Yet even of *me* he shall have need,
That monarch of the blessed seed,
Of me, of me, who now am cursed
By his fetters dire, —
To wring my secret out withal
And learn by whom his sceptre shall
Be filched from him — as was, at first,
His heavenly fire.
But he never shall enchant me
With his honey-lipped persuasion;
Never, never shall he daunt me
With the oath and threat of passion
Into speaking as they want me,
Till he loose this savage chain,
And accept the expiation
Of my sorrow, in his pain.

Chorus, 2d Antistrophe.

Thou art, sooth, a brave god,
And, for all thou hast borne
From the stroke of the rod,
Nought relaxest from scorn.
But thou speakest unto me
Too free and unworn;
And a terror strikes through me

And festers my soul
And I fear, in the roll
Of the storm, for thy fate
In the ship far from shore :
Since the son of Saturnus is hard in his hate
And unmoved in his heart evermore.

Prometheus. I know that Zeus is stern ;
I know he metes his justice by his will ;
And yet, his soul shall learn
More softness when once broken by this ill :
And curbing his unconquerable vaunt
He shall rush on in fear to meet with me
Who rush to meet with him in agony,
To issues of harmonious covenant.
Chorus. Remove the veil from all things and relate
The story to us, — of what crime accused,
Zeus smites thee with dishonorable pangs.
Speak : if to teach us do not grieve thyself.
Prometheus. The utterance of these things is torture to me,
But so, too, is their silence; each way lies
Woe strong as fate.
When gods began with wrath,
And war rose up between their starry brows,
Some choosing to cast Chronos from his throne
That Zeus might king it there, and some in haste
With opposite oaths that they would have no Zeus
To rule the gods forever, — I, who brought
The counsel I thought meetest, could not move
The Titans, children of the Heaven and Earth,
What time, disdaining in their rugged souls
My subtle machinations, they assumed
It was an easy thing for force to take
The mastery of fate. My mother, then,
Who is called not only Themis but Earth too,
(Her single beauty joys in many names)
Did teach me with reiterant prophecy
What future should be, and how conquering gods
Should not prevail by strength and violence
But by guile only. When I told them so,
They would not deign to contemplate the truth
On all sides round ; whereat I deemed it best
To lead my willing mother upwardly
And set my Themis face to face with Zeus
As willing to receive her. Tartarus,
With its abysmal cloister of the Dark,
Because I gave that counsel, covers up
The antique Chronos and his siding hosts,
And, by that counsel helped, the king of gods
Hath recompensed me with these bitter pangs :
For kingship wears a cancer at the heart, —
Distrust in friendship. Do ye also ask
What crime it is for which he tortures me ?
That shall be clear before you. When at first
He filled his father's throne, he instantly
Made various gifts of glory to the gods
And dealt the empire out. Alone of men,
Of miserable men, he took no count,
But yearned to sweep their track off from the world
And plant a newer race there. Not a god
Resisted such desire except myself.
I dared it ! *I* drew mortals back to light,
From meditated ruin deep as hell !
For which wrong, I am bent down in these pangs
Dreadful to suffer, mournful to behold,
And I, who pitied man, am thought myself
Unworthy of pity; while I render out
Deep rhythms of anguish 'neath the harping hand
That strikes me thus — a sight to shame your Zeus !
Chorus. Hard as thy chains and cold as all these rocks
Is he, Prometheus, who withholds his heart
From joining in thy woe. I yearned before
To fly this sight; and, now I gaze on it,
I sicken inwards.
Prometheus. To my friends, indeed,
I must be a sad sight.
Chorus. And didst thou sin
No more than so ?
Prometheus. I did restrain besides
My mortals from premeditating death.
Chorus. How didst thou medicine the plague-fear of death ?
Prometheus. I set blind Hopes to inhabit in their house.

Chorus. By that gift thou didst help thy mortals well.
Prometheus. I gave them also fire.
Chorus. And have they now,
Those creatures of a day, the red-eyed fire?
Prometheus. They have: and shall learn by it many arts.
Chorus. And truly for such sins Zeus tortures thee
And will remit no anguish? Is there set
No limit before thee to thine agony?
Prometheus. No other: only what seems good to HIM.
Chorus. And how will it seem good? what hope remains?
Seest thou not that thou hast sinned? But that thou hast sinned
It glads me not to speak of, and grieves thee:
Then let it pass from both, and seek thyself
Some outlet from distress.
Prometheus. It is in truth
An easy thing to stand aloof from pain
And lavish exhortation and advice
On one vexed sorely by it. I have known
All in prevision. By my choice, my choice,
I freely sinned — I will confess my sin —
And helping mortals, found my own despair.
I did not think indeed that I should pine
Beneath such pangs against such skyey rocks,
Doomed to this drear hill and no neighboring
Of any life: but mourn not ye for griefs
I bear to-day: hear rather, drooping down
To the plain, how other woes creep on to me,
And learn the consummation of my doom.
Beseech you, nymphs, beseech you, grieve for me
Who now am grieving; for Grief walks the earth,
And sits down at the foot of each by turns.
Chorus. We hear the deep clash of thy words,
Prometheus, and obey.
And I spring with a rapid foot away
From the rushing car and the holy air,
The track of birds;
And I drop to the rugged ground and there
Await the tale of thy despair.

OCEANUS *enters.*

Oceanus. I reach the bourn of my weary road,
Where I may see and answer thee,
Prometheus, in thine agony.
On the back of the quick-winged bird I glode,
And I bridled him in
With the will of a god.
Behold, thy sorrow aches in me
Constrained by the force of kin.
Nay, though that tie were all undone,
For the life of none beneath the sun
Would I seek a larger benison
Than I seek for thine.
And thou shalt learn my words are truth, —
That no fair parlance of the mouth
Grows falsely out of mine.
Now give me a deed to prove my faith;
For no faster friend is named in breath
Than I, Oceanus, am thine.
Prometheus. Ha! what has brought thee? Hast thou also come
To look upon my woe? How hast thou dared
To leave the depths called after thee, the caves
Self-hewn and self-roofed with spontaneous rock,
To visit earth, the mother of my chain?
Hast come indeed to view my doom and mourn
That I should sorrow thus? Gaze on, and see
How I, the fast friend of your Zeus, — how I
The erector of the empire in his hand,
Am bent beneath that hand, in this despair.
Oceanus. Prometheus, I behold: and I would fain
Exhort thee, though already subtle enough,
To a better wisdom. Titan, know thyself,
And take new softness to thy manners since
A new king rules the gods. If words like these,
Harsh words and trenchant, thou wilt fling abroad,
Zeus haply, though he sit so far and high,

May hear thee do it, and so, this wrath of his
Which now affects thee fiercely, shall appear
A mere child's sport at vengeance. Wretched god,
Rather dismiss the passion which thou hast,
And seek a change from grief. Perhaps I seem
To address thee with old saws and outworn sense, —
Yet such a curse, Prometheus, surely waits
On lips that speak too proudly: thou, meantime,
Art none the meeker, nor dost yield a jot
To evil circumstance, preparing still
To swell the account of grief with other griefs
Than what are borne. Beseech thee, use me then
For counsel: do not spurn against the pricks, —
Seeing that who reigns, reigns by cruelty
Instead of right. And now, I go from hence,
And will endeavor if a power of mine
Can break thy fetters through. For thee, — be calm,
And smooth thy words from passion. Knowest thou not
Of perfect knowledge, thou who knowest too much,
That where the tongue wags, ruin never lags?
Prometheus. I gratulate thee who hast shared and dared
All things with me, except their penalty.
Enough so! leave these thoughts. It cannot be
That thou shouldst move HIM. HE may *not* be moved;
And *thou*, beware of sorrow on this road.
Oceanus. Ay! ever wiser for another's use
Than thine! the event, and not the prophecy,
Attests it to me. Yet where now I rush,
Thy wisdom hath no power to drag me back;
Because I glory, glory, to go hence
And win for thee deliverance from thy pangs,
As a free gift from Zeus.
Prometheus. Why there, again,
I give thee gratulation and applause.
Thou lackest no goodwill. But, as for deeds,
Do nought! 't were all done vainly; helping nought,
Whatever thou wouldst do. Rather take rest
And keep thyself from evil. If I grieve,
I do not therefore wish to multiply
The griefs of others. Verily, not so!
For still my brother's doom doth vex my soul, —
My brother Atlas, standing in the west,
Shouldering the column of the heaven and earth,
A difficult burden! I have also seen,
And pitied as I saw, the earth-born one,
The inhabitant of old Cilician caves,
The great war-monster of the hundred heads,
(All taken and bowed beneath the violent Hand,)
Typhon the fierce, who did resist the gods,
And, hissing slaughter from his dreadful jaws,
Flash out ferocious glory from his eyes
As if to storm the throne of Zeus. Whereat,
The sleepless arrow of Zeus flew straight at him,
The headlong bolt of thunder breathing flame,
And struck him downward from his eminence
Of exultation; through the very soul
It struck him, and his strength was withered up
To ashes, thunder-blasted. Now he lies
A helpless trunk supinely, at full length
Beside the strait of ocean, spurred into
By roots of Ætna; high upon whose tops
Hephæstus sits and strikes the flashing ore.
From thence the rivers of fire shall burst away
Hereafter, and devour with savage jaws
The equal plains of fruitful Sicily,
Such passion he shall boil back in hot darts
Of an insatiate fury and sough of flame,
Fallen Typhon, — howsoever struck and charred
By Zeus's bolted thunder. But for thee,
Thou art not so unlearned as to need

My teaching — let thy knowledge save thyself.
I quaff the full cup of a present doom,
And wait till Zeus hath quenched his will in wrath.
Oceanus. Prometheus, art thou ignorant of this,
That words do medicine anger?
Prometheus. If the word
With seasonable softness touch the soul
And, where the parts are ulcerous, sear them not
By any rudeness.
Oceanus. With a noble aim
To dare as nobly — is there harm in *that?*
Dost thou discern it? Teach me.
Prometheus. I discern
Vain aspiration, unresultive work.
Oceanus. Then suffer me to bear the brunt of this!
Since it is profitable that one who is wise
Should seem not wise at all.
Prometheus. And such would seem
My very crime.
Oceanus. In truth thine argument
Sends me back home.
Prometheus. Lest any lament for me
Should cast thee down to hate.
Oceanus. The hate of him
Who sits a new king on the absolute throne?
Prometheus. Beware of him, lest thine heart grieve by him.
Oceanus. Thy doom, Prometheus, be my teacher!
Prometheus. Go.
Depart — beware — and keep the mind thou hast.
Oceanus. Thy words drive after, as I rush before.
Lo! my four-footed bird sweeps smooth and wide
The flats of air with balanced pinions, glad
To bend his knee at home in the ocean-stall.
[OCEANUS *departs.*

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

I moan thy fate, I moan for thee,
Prometheus! From my eyes too tender,
Drop after drop incessantly
The tears of my heart's pity render
My cheeks wet from their fountains free;
Because that Zeus, the stern and cold,
Whose law is taken from his breast,
Uplifts his sceptre manifest
Over the gods of old.

1st Antistrophe.

All the land is moaning
With a murmured plaint to-day;
All the mortal nations
Having habitations
In the holy Asia
Are a dirge entoning
For thine honor and thy brothers',
Once majestic beyond others
In the old belief, —
Now are groaning in the groaning
Of thy deep-voiced grief.

2d Strophe.

Mourn the maids inhabitant
Of the Colchian land,
Who with white, calm bosoms stand
In the battle's roar:
Mourn the Scythian tribes that haunt
The verge of earth, Mæotis' shore.

2d Antistrophe.

Yea! Arabia's battle-crown,
And dwellers in the beetling town
Mount Caucasus sublimely nears, —
An iron squadron, thundering down
With the sharp-prowed spears.

But one other before, have I seen to remain
By invincible pain
Bound and vanquished, — one Titan! 't was Atlas, who bears
In a curse from the gods, by that strength of his own
Which he evermore wears,
The weight of the heaven on his shoulder alone,
While he sighs up the stars;
And the tides of the ocean wail bursting their bars, —
Murmurs still the profound,
And black Hades roars up through the chasm of the ground,
And the fountains of pure-running rivers moan low
In a pathos of woe.

Prometheus. Beseech you, think not I am silent thus

Through pride or scorn. I only gnaw my heart
With meditation, seeing myself so wronged.
For see — their honors to these new-made gods,
What other gave but I, and dealt them out
With distribution? Ay — but here I am dumb!
For here, I should repeat your knowledge to you,
If I spake aught. List rather to the deeds
I did for mortals; how, being fools before,
I made them wise and true in aim of soul.
And let me tell you — not as taunting men,
But teaching you the intention of my gifts,
How, first beholding, they beheld in vain,
And hearing, heard not, but, like shapes in dreams,
Mixed all things wildly down the tedious time,
Nor knew to build a house against the sun
With wickered sides, nor any woodcraft knew,
But lived, like silly ants, beneath the ground
In hollow caves unsunned. There, came to them
No steadfast sign of winter, nor of spring
Flower-perfumed, nor of summer full of fruit,
But blindly and lawlessly they did all things,
Until I taught them how the stars do rise
And set in mystery, and devised for them
Number, the inducer of philosophies,
The synthesis of Letters, and, beside,
The artificer of all things, Memory,
That sweet Muse-mother. I was first to yoke
The servile beasts in couples, carrying
An heirdom of man's burdens on their backs.
I joined to chariots, steeds, that love the bit
They champ at — the chief pomp of golden ease.
And none but I originated ships,
The seaman's chariots, wandering on the brine
With linen wings. And I — oh, miserable! —
Who did devise for mortals all these arts,
Have no device left now to save myself
From the woe I suffer.
  Chorus. Most unseemly woe
Thou sufferest, and dost stagger from the sense
Bewildered! like a bad leech falling sick
Thou art faint at soul, and canst not find the drugs
Required to save thyself.
  Prometheus. Hearken the rest,
And marvel further, what more arts and means
I did invent, — this, greatest: if a man
Fell sick, there was no cure, nor esculent
Nor chrism nor liquid, but for lack of drugs
Men pined and wasted, till I showed them all
Those mixtures of emollient remedies
Whereby they might be rescued from disease.
I fixed the various rules of mantic art,
Discerned the vision from the common dream,
Instructed them in vocal auguries
Hard to interpret, and defined as plain
The wayside omens, — flights of crook-clawed birds, —
Showed which are, by their nature, fortunate,
And which not so, and what the food of each,
And what the hates, affections, social needs,
Of all to one another, — taught what sign
Of visceral lightness, colored to a shade,
May charm the genial gods, and what fair spots
Commend the lung and liver. Burning so
The limbs encased in fat, and the long chine,
I led my mortals on to an art abstruse,
And cleared their eyes to the image in the fire,
Erst filmed in dark. Enough said now of this.
For the other helps of man hid underground,
The iron and the brass, silver and gold,
Can any dare affirm he found them out
Before me? none, I know! unless he choose
To lie in his vaunt. In one word learn the whole, —
That all arts came to mortals from Prometheus.
  Chorus. Give mortals now no inexpedient help,

Neglecting thine own sorrow. I have hope still
To see thee, breaking from the fetter here,
Stand up as strong as Zeus.
Prometheus. This ends not thus,
The oracular fate ordains. I must be bowed
By infinite woes and pangs, to escape this chain.
Necessity is stronger than mine art.
Chorus. Who holds the helm of that Necessity ?
Prometheus. The threefold Fates and the unforgetting Furies.
Chorus. Is Zeus less absolute than these are ?
Prometheus. Yea,
And therefore cannot fly what is ordained.
Chorus. What is ordained for Zeus, except to be
A king forever ?
Prometheus. 'T is too early yet
For thee to learn it: ask no more.
Chorus. Perhaps
Thy secret may be something holy ?
Prometheus. Turn
To another matter: this, it is not time
To speak abroad, but utterly to veil
In silence. For by that same secret kept,
I 'scape this chain's dishonor and its woe.

Chorus, 1st Strophe.

Never, oh never
May Zeus, the all-giver,
Wrestle down from his throne
In that might of his own
To antagonize mine !
Nor let me delay
As I bend on my way
Toward the gods of the shrine
Where the altar is full
Of the blood of the bull,
Near the tossing brine
Of Ocean my father.
May no sin be sped in the word that is said,
But my vow be rather
Consummated,
Nor evermore fail, nor evermore pine.

1st Antistrophe.

'T is sweet to have
Life lengthened out
With hopes proved brave
By the very doubt,
Till the spirit enfold
Those manifest joys which were foretold.
But I thrill to behold
Thee, victim doomed,
By the countless cares
And the drear despairs
Forever consumed, —
And all because thou, who art fearless now
Of Zeus above,
Didst overflow for mankind below
With a free-souled, reverent love.
Ah friend, behold and see !
What 's all the beauty of humanity ?
Can it be fair ?
What 's all the strength ? is it strong ?
And what hope can they bear,
These dying livers — living one day long ?
Ah, seest thou not, my friend,
How feeble and slow
And like a dream, doth go
This poor blind manhood, drifted from its end ?
And how no mortal wranglings can confuse
The harmony of Zeus ?
Prometheus, I have learnt these things
From the sorrow in thy face.
Another song did fold its wings
Upon my lips in other days,
When round the bath and round the bed
The hymeneal chant instead
I sang for thee, and smiled, —
And thou didst lead, with gifts and vows,
Hesione, my father's child,
To be thy wedded spouse.

Io *enters.*

Io. What land is this ? what people is here ?
And who is he that writhes, I see,
In the rock-hung chain ?
Now what is the crime that hath brought thee to pain ?
Now what is the land — make answer free —
Which I wander through, in my wrong and fear ?
Ah ! ah ! ah me !
The gad-fly stingeth to agony !
O Earth, keep off that phantasm pale
Of earth-born Argus ! — ah ! — I quail
When my soul descries
That herdsman with the myriad eyes

Which seem, as he comes, one crafty eye.
Graves hide him not, though he should die,
But he doggeth me in my misery
From the roots of death, on high — on high —
And along the sands of the siding deep,
All famine-worn, he follows me,
And his waxen reed doth undersound
The waters round
And giveth a measure that giveth sleep.

Woe, woe, woe!
Where shall my weary course be done?
What wouldst thou with me, Saturn's son?
And in what have I sinned, that I should go
Thus yoked to grief by thine hand forever?
Ah! ah! dost vex me so
That I madden and shiver
Stung through with dread?
Flash the fire down to burn me!
Heave the earth up to cover me!
Plunge me in the deep, with the salt waves over me,
That the sea-beasts may be fed!
O king, do not spurn me
In my prayer!
For this wandering, everlonger, evermore,
Hath overworn me,
And I know not on what shore
I may rest from my despair.

Chorus. Hearest thou what the ox-horned maiden saith?
Prometheus. How could I choose but hearken what she saith,
The frenzied maiden?—Inachus's child?—
Who love-warms Zeus's heart, and now is lashed
By Herè's hate along the unending ways?

Io. Who taught thee to articulate that name, —
My father's? Speak to his child
By grief and shame defiled!
Who art thou, victim, thou who dost acclaim
Mine anguish in true words on the wide air,
And callest too by name the curse that came
From Herè unaware,
To waste and pierce me with its maddening goad?
Ah — ah — I leap
With the pang of the hungry — I bound on the road —
I am driven by my doom —
I am overcome
By the wrath of an enemy strong and deep!
Are any of those who have tasted pain,
Alas! as wretched as I?
Now tell me plain, doth aught remain
For my soul to endure beneath the sky?
Is there any help to be holpen by?
If knowledge be in thee, let it be said!
Cry aloud — cry
To the wandering, woeful maid!

Prometheus. Whatever thou wouldst learn I will declare, —
No riddle upon my lips, but such straight words
As friends should use to each other when they talk.
Thou seest Prometheus, who gave mortals fire.
Io. O common Help of all men, known of all,
O miserable Prometheus, — for what cause
Dost thou endure thus?
Prometheus. I have done with wail
For my own griefs, but lately.
Io. Wilt thou not
Vouchsafe the boon to me?
Prometheus. Say what thou wilt,
For I vouchsafe all.
Io. Speak then, and reveal
Who shut thee in this chasm.
Prometheus. The will of Zeus,
The hand of his Hephæstus.
Io. And what crime
Dost expiate so?
Prometheus. Enough for thee I have told
In so much only.
Io. Nay, but show besides
The limit of my wandering, and the time
Which yet is lacking to fulfil my grief.
Prometheus. Why, not to know were better than to know
For such as thou.
Io. Beseech thee, blind me not
To that which I must suffer.
Prometheus. If I do,
The reason is not that I grudge a boon.

Io. What reason, then, prevents thy speaking out?
Prometheus. No grudging; but a fear to break thine heart.
Io. Less care for me, I pray thee. Certainty
I count for advantage.
Prometheus. Thou wilt have it so,
And therefore I must speak. Now hear —
Chorus. Not yet.
Give half the guerdon my way. Let us learn
First, what the curse is that befell the maid, —
Her own voice telling her own wasting woes:
The sequence of that anguish shall await
The teaching of thy lips.
Prometheus. It doth behove
That thou, Maid Io, shouldst vouchsafe to these
The grace they pray, — the more, because they are called
Thy father's sisters: since to open out
And mourn out grief where it is possible
To draw a tear from the audience, is a work
That pays its own price well.
Io. I cannot choose
But trust you, nymphs, and tell you all ye ask,
In clear words — though I sob amid my speech
In speaking of the storm-curse sent from Zeus,
And of my beauty, from what height it took
Its swoop on me, poor wretch! left thus deformed
And monstrous to your eyes. For evermore
Around my virgin-chamber, wandering went
The nightly visions which entreated me
With syllabled smooth sweetness. — 'Blessed maid,
Why lengthen out thy maiden hours when fate
Permits the noblest spousal in the world?
When Zeus burns with the arrow of thy love
And fain would touch thy beauty? — Maiden, thou
Despise not Zeus! depart to Lernè's mead
That's green around thy father's flocks and stalls,
Until the passion of the heavenly Eye
Be quenched in sight.' Such dreams did all night long
Constrain me — me, unhappy! — till I dared
To tell my father how they trod the dark
With visionary steps. Whereat he sent
His frequent heralds to the Pythian fane,
And also to Dodona, and inquired
How best, by act or speech, to please the gods.
The same returning brought back oracles
Of doubtful sense, indefinite response,
Dark to interpret; but at last there came
To Inachus an answer that was clear,
Thrown straight as any bolt, and spoken out —
This — 'he should drive me from my home and land,
And bid me wander to the extreme verge
Of all the earth — or, if he willed it not,
Should have a thunder with a fiery eye
Leap straight from Zeus to burn up all his race
To the last root of it.' By which Loxian word
Subdued, he drove me forth and shut me out,
He loth, me loth, — but Zeus's violent bit
Compelled him to the deed: when instantly
My body and soul were changèd and distraught,
And, hornèd as ye see, and spurred along
By the fanged insect, with a maniac leap
I rushed on to Cenchrea's limpid stream
And Lernè's fountain-water. There, the earth-born,
The herdsman Argus, most immitigable
Of wrath, did find me out, and track me out
With countless eyes set staring at my steps:
And though an unexpected sudden doom
Drew him from life, I, curse-tormented still,
Am driven from land to land before the scourge
The gods hold o'er me. So thou hast heard the past,
And if a bitter future thou canst tell,
Speak on. I charge thee, do not flatter me
Through pity, with false words; for, in my mind,
Deceiving works more shame than torturing doth.

Chorus.

Ah! silence here!
Nevermore, nevermore
Would I languish for
The stranger's word
To thrill in mine ear —
Nevermore for the wrong and the woe and the fear

So hard to behold,
So cruel to bear,
Piercing my soul with a double-edged sword
Of a sliding cold.
Ah Fate! ah me!
I shudder to see
This wandering maid in her agony.

Prometheus. Grief is too quick in thee and fear too full:
Be patient till thou hast learnt the rest.
Chorus. Speak: teach.
To those who are sad already, it seems sweet,
By clear foreknowledge to make perfect, pain.
Prometheus. The boon ye asked me first was lightly won, —
For first ye asked the story of this maid's grief
As her own lips might tell it. Now remains
To list what other sorrows she so young
Must bear from Herè. Inachus's child,
O thou! drop down thy soul my weighty words,
And measure out the landmarks which are set
To end thy wandering. Toward the orient sun
First turn thy face from mine and journey on
Along the desert flats till thou shalt come
Where Scythia's shepherd peoples dwell aloft,
Perched in wheeled wagons under woven roofs,
And twang the rapid arrow past the bow —
Approach them not; but siding in thy course
The rugged shore-rocks resonant to the sea,
Depart that country. On the left hand dwell
The iron-workers, called the Chalybes,
Of whom beware, for certes they are uncouth
And nowise bland to strangers. Reaching so
The stream Hybristes (well the *scorner* called),
Attempt no passage, — it is hard to pass, —
Or ere thou come to Caucasus itself,
That highest of mountains, where the river leaps
The precipice in his strength. Thou must toil up
Those mountain-tops that neighbor with the stars,
And tread the south way, and draw near, at last,
The Amazonian host that hateth man,
Inhabitants of Themiscyra, close
Upon Thermodon, where the sea's rough jaw
Doth gnash at Salmydessa and provide
A cruel host to seamen, and to ships
A stepdame. They with unreluctant hand
Shall lead thee on and on, till thou arrive
Just where the ocean-gates show narrowest
On the Cimmerian isthmus. Leaving which,
Behoves thee swim with fortitude of soul
The strait Mæotis. Ay, and evermore
That traverse shall be famous on men's lips,
That strait, called Bosphorus, the horned one's road,
So named because of thee, who so wilt go
From Europe's plain to Asia's continent.
How think ye, nymphs? the king of gods appears
Impartial in ferocious deeds? Behold!
The god desirous of this mortal's love
Hath cursed her with these wanderings. Ah, fair child,
Thou hast met a bitter groom for bridal troth!
For all thou yet hast heard can only prove
The incompleted prelude of thy doom.
Io. Ah, ah!
Prometheus. Is 't thy turn, now, to shriek and moan?
How wilt thou, when thou hast hearkened what remains?
Chorus. Besides the grief thou hast told can aught remain?
Prometheus. A sea — of foredoomed evil worked to storm.
Io. What boots my life, then? why not cast myself
Down headlong from this miserable rock,
That, dashed against the flats, I may redeem
My soul from sorrow? Better once to die
Than day by day to suffer.
Prometheus. Verily,
It would be hard for thee to bear my woe
For whom it is appointed not to die.
Death frees from woe: but I before me see
In all my far prevision not a bound
To all I suffer, ere that Zeus shall fall
From being a king.
Io. And can it ever be
That Zeus shall fall from empire?

Prometheus. *Thou*, methinks,
Wouldst take some joy to see it.
Io. Could I choose?
I who endure such pangs now, by that god!
Prometheus. Learn from me, therefore, that the event shall be.
Io. By whom shall his imperial sceptred hand
Be emptied so?
Prometheus. Himself shall spoil himself,
Through his idiotic counsels.
Io. How? declare:
Unless the word bring evil.
Prometheus. He shall wed;
And in the marriage-bond be joined to grief.
Io. A heavenly bride — or human? Speak it out
If it be utterable.
Prometheus. Why should I say which?
It ought not to be uttered, verily.
Io. Then
It is his wife shall tear him from his throne?
Prometheus. It is his wife shall bear a son to him,
More mighty than the father.
Io. From this doom
Hath he no refuge?
Prometheus. None: or ere that I,
Loosed from these fetters —
Io. Yea — but who shall loose
While Zeus is adverse?
Prometheus. One who is born of thee:
It is ordained so.
Io. What is this thou sayest?
A son of mine shall liberate thee from woe?
Prometheus. After ten generations, count three more,
And find him in the third.
Io. The oracle
Remains obscure.
Prometheus. And search it not, to learn
Thine own griefs from it.
Io. Point me not to a good,
To leave me straight bereaved.
Prometheus. I am prepared
To grant thee one of two things.
Io. But which two?
Set them before me; grant me power to choose.
Prometheus. I grant it; choose now: shall I name aloud
What griefs remain to wound thee, or what hand
Shall save me out of mine?
Chorus. Vouchsafe, O god,
The one grace of the twain to her who prays;
The next to me; and turn back neither prayer
Dishonor'd by denial. To herself
Recount the future wandering of her feet;
Then point me to the looser of thy chain,
Because I yearn to know him.
Prometheus. Since ye will,
Of absolute will, this knowledge, I will set
No contrary against it, nor keep back
A word of all ye ask for. Io, first
To thee I must relate thy wandering course
Far winding. As I tell it, write it down
In thy soul's book of memories. When thou hast past
The refluent bound that parts two continents,
Track on the footsteps of the orient sun
In his own fire, across the roar of seas, —
Fly till thou hast reached the Gorgonæan flats
Beside Cisthené. There, the Phorcides,
Three ancient maidens, live, with shape of swan,
One tooth between them, and one common eye:
On whom the sun doth never look at all
With all his rays, nor evermore the moon
When she looks through the night. Anear to whom
Are the Gorgon sisters three, enclothed with wings,
With twisted snakes for ringlets, man-abhorred:
There is no mortal gazes in their face
And gazing can breathe on. I speak of such
To guard thee from their horror. Ay, and list
Another tale of a dreadful sight; beware
The Griffins, those unbarking dogs of Zeus,
Those sharp-mouthed dogs! — and the Arimaspian host
Of one-eyed horsemen, habiting beside
The river of Pluto that runs bright with gold:
Approach them not, beseech thee! Presently
Thou 'lt come to a distant land, a dusky tribe
Of dwellers at the fountain of the Sun,
Whence flows the river Æthiops; wind along
Its banks and turn off at the cataracts,
Just as the Nile pours from the Bybline hills
His holy and sweet wave; his course shall guide

Thine own to that triangular Nile-ground
Where, Io, is ordained for thee and thine
A lengthened exile. Have I said in this
Aught darkly or incompletely ? — now repeat
The question, make the knowledge fuller ! Lo,
I have more leisure than I covet, here.
Chorus. If thou canst tell us aught that 's left untold,
Or loosely told, of her most dreary flight,
Declare it straight: but if thou hast uttered all,
Grant us that latter grace for which we prayed,
Remembering how we prayed it.
Prometheus. She has heard
The uttermost of her wandering. There it ends.
But that she may be certain not to have heard
All vainly, I will speak what she endured
Ere coming hither, and invoke the past
To prove my prescience true. And so — to leave
A multitude of words and pass at once
To the subject of thy course — when thou hadst gone
To those Molossian plains which sweep around
Dodona shouldering Heaven, whereby the fane
Of Zeus Thesprotian keepeth oracle,
And, wonder past belief, where oaks do wave
Articulate adjurations — (ay, the same
Saluted thee in no perplexèd phrase
But clear with glory, noble wife of Zeus
That shouldst be, — there some sweetness took thy sense !)
Thou didst rush further onward, stung along
The ocean-shore, toward Rhea's mighty bay
And, tost back from it, wast tost to it again
In stormy evolution: — and, know well,
In coming time that hollow of the sea
Shall bear the name Ionian and present
A monument of Io's passage through
Unto all mortals. Be these words the signs
Of my soul's power to look beyond the veil
Of visible things. The rest, to you and her
I will declare in common audience, nymphs,
Returning thither where my speech brake off.
There is a town Canobus, built upon
The earth's fair margin at the mouth of Nile
And on the mound washed up by it; Io, there
Shall Zeus give back to thee thy perfect mind,
And only by the pressure and the touch
Of a hand not terrible; and thou to Zeus
Shalt bear a dusky son who shall be called
Thence, Epaphus, *Touched*. That son shall pluck the fruit
Of all that land wide-watered by the flow
Of Nile; but after him, when counting out
As far as the fifth full generation, then
Full fifty maidens, a fair woman-race,
Shall back to Argos turn reluctantly,
To fly the proffered nuptials of their kin,
Their father's brothers. These being passion-struck,
Like falcons bearing hard on flying doves,
Shall follow, hunting at a quarry of love
They should not hunt; till envious Heaven maintain
A curse betwixt that beauty and their desire,
And Greece receive them, to be overcome
In murtherous woman-war, by fierce red hands
Kept savage by the night. For every wife
Shall slay a husband, dyeing deep in blood
The sword of a double edge — (I wish indeed
As fair a marriage-joy to all my foes !)
One bride alone shall fail to smite to death
The head upon her pillow, touched with love,
Made impotent of purpose and impelled
To choose the lesser evil, — shame on her cheeks,
Than blood-guilt on her hands : which bride shall bear
A royal race in Argos. Tedious speech
Were needed to relate particulars
Of these things; 't is enough that from her seed
Shall spring the strong He, famous with the bow,
Whose arm shall break my fetters off. Behold,
My mother Themis, that old Titaness,
Delivered to me such an oracle, —
But how and when, I should be long to speak,
And thou, in hearing, wouldst not gain at all.
Io. Eleleu, eleleu !
How the spasm and the pain

And the fire on the brain
Strike, burning me through!
How the sting of the curse, all aflame as it flew,
Pricks me onward again!
How my heart in its terror is spurning my breast,
And my eyes, like the wheels of a chariot, roll round!
I am whirled from my course, to the east, to the west,
In the whirlwind of frenzy all madly inwound—
And my mouth is unbridled for anguish and hate,
And my words beat in vain, in wild storms of unrest,
On the sea of my desolate fate.
[Io *rushes out.*

Chorus.—Strophe.

Oh, wise was he, oh, wise was he
Who first within his spirit knew
And with his tongue declared it true
That love comes best that comes unto
The equal of degree!
And that the poor and that the low
Should seek no love from those above,
Whose souls are fluttered with the flow
Of airs about their golden height,
Or proud because they see arow
Ancestral crowns of light.

Antistrophe.

Oh, never, never may ye, Fates,
Behold me with your awful eyes
Lift mine too fondly up the skies
Where Zeus upon the purple waits!
Nor let me step too near—too near
To any suitor, bright from heaven:
Because I see, because I fear
This loveless maiden vexed and lad
By this fell curse of Herè, driven
On wanderings dread and drear.

Epode.

Nay, grant an equal troth instead
Of nuptial love, to bind me by!
It will not hurt, I shall not dread
To meet it in reply.
But let not love from those above
Revert and fix me, as I said,
With that inevitable Eye!
I have no sword to fight that fight,
I have no strength to tread that path,
I know not if my nature hath
The power to bear, I cannot see
Whither from Zeus's infinite
I have the power to flee.

Prometheus. Yet Zeus, albeit most absolute of will,
Shall turn to meekness,—such a marriage-rite
He holds in preparation, which anon
Shall thrust him headlong from his gerent seat
Adown the abysmal void, and so the curse
His father Chronos muttered in his fall,
As he fell from his ancient throne and cursed,
Shall be accomplished wholly. No escape
From all that ruin shall the filial Zeus
Find granted to him from any of his gods,
Unless I teach him. I the refuge know,
And I, the means. Now, therefore, let him sit
And brave the imminent doom, and fix his faith
On his supernal noises, hurtling on
With restless hand the bolt that breathes out fire;
For these things shall not help him, none of them,
Nor hinder his perdition when he falls
To shame, and lower than patience: such a foe
He doth himself prepare against himself,
A wonder of unconquerable hate,
An organizer of sublimer fire
Than glares in lightnings, and of grander sound
Than aught the thunder rolls, out-thundering it,
With power to shatter in Poseidon's fist
The trident-spear which, while it plagues the sea,
Doth shake the shores around it. Ay, and Zeus,
Precipitated thus, shall learn at length
The difference betwixt rule and servitude.

Chorus. Thou makest threats for Zeus of thy desires.

Prometheus. I tell you, all these things shall be fulfilled.
Even so as I desire them.

Chorus. Must we then
Look out for one shall come to master Zeus?

Prometheus. These chains weigh lighter than his sorrows shall.

Chorus. How art thou not afraid to utter such words?

Prometheus. What should *I* fear who cannot die?
Chorus. But *he*
Can visit thee with dreader woe than death's.
Prometheus. Why, let him do it! I am here, prepared
For all things and their pangs.
Chorus. The wise are they
Who reverence Adrasteia.
Prometheus. Reverence thou,
Adore thou, flatter thou, whomever reigns,
Whenever reigning! but for me, your Zeus
Is less than nothing. Let him act and reign
His brief hour out according to his will —
He will not, therefore, rule the gods too long.
But lo! I see that courier-god of Zeus,
That new-made menial of the new-crowned king:
He doubtless comes to announce to us something new.

Hermes *enters.*

Hermes. I speak to thee, the sophist, the talker-down
Of scorn by scorn, the sinner against gods,
The reverencer of men, the thief of fire, —
I speak to thee and adjure thee! Zeus requires
Thy declaration of what marriage-rite
Thus moves thy vaunt and shall hereafter cause
His fall from empire. Do not wrap thy speech
In riddles, but speak clearly! Never cast
Ambiguous paths, Prometheus, for my feet,
Since Zeus, thou mayst perceive, is scarcely won
To mercy by such means.
Prometheus. A speech well-mouthed
In the utterance, and full-minded in the sense,
As doth befit a servant of the gods!
New gods, ye newly reign, and think forsooth
Ye dwell in towers too high for any dart
To carry a wound there! — have I not stood by
While two kings fell from thence? and shall I not
Behold the third, the same who rules you now,
Fall, shamed to sudden ruin? — Do I seem
To tremble and quail before your modern gods?
Far be it from me! — For thyself, depart,
Re-tread thy steps in haste. To all thou hast asked
I answer nothing.
Hermes. Such a wind of pride
Impelled thee of yore full-sail upon these rocks.
Prometheus. I would not barter — learn thou soothly that! —
My suffering for thy service. I maintain
It is a nobler thing to serve these rocks
Than live a faithful slave to father Zeus.
Thus upon scorners I retort their scorn.
Hermes. It seems that thou dost glory in thy despair.
Prometheus. I glory? would my foes did glory so,
And I stood by to see them! — naming whom,
Thou art not unremembered.
Hermes. Dost thou charge
Me also with the blame of thy mischance?
Prometheus. I tell thee I loathe the universal gods,
Who for the good I gave them rendered back
The ill of their injustice.
Hermes. Thou art mad —
Thou art raving, Titan, at the fever-height.
Prometheus. If it be madness to abhor my foes,
May I be mad!
Hermes. If thou wert prosperous
Thou wouldst be unendurable.
Prometheus. Alas!
Hermes. Zeus knows not that word.
Prometheus. But maturing Time
Teaches all things.
Hermes. Howbeit, thou hast not learnt
The wisdom yet, thou needest.
Prometheus. If I had,
I should not talk thus with a slave like thee.
Hermes. No answer thou vouchsafest, I believe,
To the great Sire's requirement.
Prometheus. Verily
I owe him grateful service, — and should pay it.
Hermes. Why, thou dost mock me, Titan, as I stood
A child before thy face.
Prometheus. No child, forsooth,
But yet more foolish than a foolish child,
If thou expect that I should answer aught
Thy Zeus can ask. No torture from his hand
Nor any machination in the world

Shall force mine utterance ere he loose, himself,
These cankerous fetters from me. For the rest,
Let him now hurl his blanching lightnings down,
And with his white-winged snows and mutterings deep 1179
Of subterranean thunders mix all things,
Confound them in disorder. None of this
Shall bend my sturdy will and make me speak
The name of his dethroner who shall come.
Hermes. Can this avail thee? Look to it!
Prometheus. Long ago
It was looked forward to, precounselled of.
Hermes. Vain god, take righteous courage! dare for once
To apprehend and front thine agonies
With a just prudence.
Prometheus. Vainly dost thou chafe
My soul with exhortation, as yonder sea
Goes beating on the rock. Oh, think no more 1190
That I, fear-struck by Zeus to a woman's mind,
Will supplicate him, loathèd as he is,
With feminine upliftings of my hands,
To break these chains. Far from me be the thought!
Hermes. I have indeed, methinks, said much in vain,
For still thy heart beneath my showers of prayers
Lies dry and hard — nay, leaps like a young horse
Who bites against the new bit in his teeth,
And tugs and struggles against the new-tried rein, —
Still fiercest in the feeblest thing of all, 1200
Which sophism is; since absolute will disjoined
From perfect mind is worse than weak. Behold,
Unless my words persuade thee, what a blast
And whirlwind of inevitable woe
Must sweep persuasion through thee! For at first
The Father will split up this jut of rock
With the great thunder and the bolted flame
And hide thy body where a hinge of stone
Shall catch it like an arm; and when thou hast passed 1209
A long black time within, thou shalt come out
To front the sun while Zeus's wingèd hound,
The strong carnivorous eagle, shall wheel down
To meet thee, self-called to a daily feast,
And set his fierce beak in thee and tear off
The long rags of thy flesh and batten deep
Upon thy dusky liver. Do not look
For any end moreover to this curse
Or ere some god appear, to accept thy pangs
On his own head vicarious, and descend
With unreluctant step the darks of hell 1220
And gloomy abysses around Tartarus.
Then ponder this — this threat is not a growth
Of vain invention; it is spoken and meant;
King Zeus's mouth is impotent to lie,
Consummating the utterance by the act;
So, look to it, thou! take heed, and nevermore
Forget good counsel, to indulge self-will.
Chorus. Our Hermes suits his reasons to the times;
At least I think so, since he bids thee drop
Self-will for prudent counsel. Yield to him!
When the wise err, their wisdom makes their shame. 1231
Prometheus. Unto me the foreknower, this mandate of power
He cries, to reveal it.
What's strange in my fate, if I suffer from hate
At the hour that I feel it?
Let the locks of the lightning, all bristling and whitening,
Flash, coiling me round,
While the æther goes surging 'neath thunder and scourging
Of wild winds unbound!
Let the blast of the firmament whirl from its place 1240
The earth rooted below,
And the brine of the ocean, in rapid emotion,
Be driven in the face
Of the stars up in heaven, as they walk to and fro!
Let him hurl me anon into Tartarus — on —
To the blackest degree,
With Necessity's vortices strangling me down;
But he cannot join death to a fate meant for *me!*
Hermes. Why, the words that he speaks and the thoughts that he thinks
Are maniacal! — add, 1250

If the Fate who hath bound him should loose not the links,
He were utterly mad.
Then depart ye who groan with him,
Leaving to moan with him, —
Go in haste! lest the roar of the thunder anearing
Should blast you to idiocy, living and hearing.
Chorus. Change thy speech for another, thy thought for a new,
If to move me and teach me indeed be thy care!
For thy words swerve so far from the loyal and true
That the thunder of Zeus seems more easy to bear.
How! couldst teach me to venture such vileness? behold!
I *choose*, with this victim, this anguish foretold!
I recoil from the traitor in hate and disdain,
And I know that the curse of the treason is worse
Than the pang of the chain.
Hermes. Then remember, O nymphs, what I tell you before,
Nor, when pierced by the arrows that Até will throw you,
Cast blame on your fate and declare evermore
That Zeus thrust you on anguish he did not foreshow you.
Nay, verily, nay! for ye perish anon
For your deed — by your choice. By no blindness of doubt,
No abruptness of doom, but by madness alone,
In the great net of Até, whence none cometh out,
Ye are wound and undone.
Prometheus. Ay! in act now, in word now no more,
Earth is rocking in space.
And the thunders crash up with a roar upon roar,
And the eddying lightnings flash fire in my face,
And the whirlwinds are whirling the dust round and round,
And the blasts of the winds universal leap free
And blow each upon each with a passion of sound,
And æther goes mingling in storm with the sea.
Such a curse on my head, in a manifest dread,
From the hand of your Zeus has been hurtled along.
O my mother's fair glory! O Æther, enringing
All eyes with the sweet common light of thy bringing!
Dost see how I suffer this wrong?

A LAMENT FOR ADONIS

FROM THE GREEK OF BION

I

I MOURN for Adonis — Adonis is dead,
Fair Adonis is dead and the Loves are lamenting.
Sleep, Cypris, no more on thy purple-strewed bed:
Arise, wretch stoled in black; beat thy breast unrelenting,
And shriek to the worlds, 'Fair Adonis is dead!'

II

I mourn for Adonis — the Loves are lamenting,
He lies on the hills in his beauty and death;
The white tusk of a boar has transpierced his white thigh.
Cytherea grows mad at his thin gasping breath,
While the black blood drips down on the pale ivory,
And his eyeballs lie quenched with the weight of his brows,
The rose fades from his lips, and upon them just parted
The kiss dies the goddess consents not to lose,
Though the kiss of the Dead cannot make her glad-hearted:
He knows not who kisses him dead in the dews.

III

I mourn for Adonis — the Loves are lamenting.
Deep, deep in the thigh is Adonis's wound,

But a deeper, is Cypris's bosom presenting.
The youth lieth dead while his dogs howl around,
And the nymphs weep aloud from the mists of the hill,
And the poor Aphroditê, with tresses unbound,
All dishevelled, unsandaled, shrieks mournful and shrill
Through the dusk of the groves. The thorns, tearing her feet,
Gather up the red flower of her blood which is holy,
Each footstep she takes; and the valleys repeat
The sharp cry she utters and draw it out slowly.
She calls on her spouse, her Assyrian, on him
Her own youth, while the dark blood spreads over his body,
The chest taking hue from the gash in the limb,
And the bosom, once ivory, turning to ruddy.

IV

Ah, ah, Cytherea! the Loves are lamenting.
She lost her fair spouse and so lost her fair smile:
When he lived she was fair, by the whole world's consenting,
Whose fairness is dead with him: woe worth the while!
All the mountains above and the oaklands below
Murmur, ah, ah, Adonis! the streams overflow
Aphroditê's deep wail; river-fountains in pity
Weep soft in the hills, and the flowers as they blow
Redden outward with sorrow, while all hear her go
With the song of her sadness through mountain and city.

V

Ah, ah, Cytherea! Adonis is dead,
Fair Adonis is dead — Echo answers, Adonis!
Who weeps not for Cypris, when bowing her head
She stares at the wound where it gapes and astonies?
— When, ah, ah! — she saw how the blood ran away
And empurpled the thigh, and, with wild hands flung out,
Said with sobs: 'Stay, Adonis! unhappy one, stay,
Let me feel thee once more, let me ring thee about
With the clasp of my arms, and press kiss into kiss!
Wait a little, Adonis, and kiss me again,
For the last time, beloved, — and but so much of this
That the kiss may learn life from the warmth of the strain!
— Till thy breath shall exude from thy soul to my mouth,
To my heart, and, the love-charm I once more receiving
May drink thy love in it and keep of a truth
That one kiss in the place of Adonis the living.
Thou fliest me, mournful one, fliest me far,
My Adonis, and seekest the Acheron portal, —
To Hell's cruel King goest down with a scar,
While I weep and live on like a wretched immortal,
And follow no step! O Persephonê, take him,
My husband! — thou 'rt better and brighter than I,
So all beauty flows down to thee: *I* cannot make him
Look up at my grief; there 's despair in my cry,
Since I wail for Adonis who died to me — died to me —
Then, I fear *thee!* — Art thou dead, my Adored?
Passion ends like a dream in the sleep that 's denied to me,
Cypris is widowed, the Loves seek their lord
All the house through in vain. Charm of cestus has ceased
With thy clasp! O too bold in the hunt past preventing,
Ay, mad, thou so fair, to have strife with a beast!'
Thus the goddess wailed on — and the Loves are lamenting.

VI

Ah, ah, Cytherea! Adonis is dead.
She wept tear after tear with the blood which was shed.

And both turned into flowers for the earth's garden-close,
Her tears, to the windflower; his blood, to the rose.

VII

I mourn for Adonis — Adonis is dead.
Weep no more in the woods, Cytherea, thy lover !
So, well: make a place for his corse in thy bed,
With the purples thou sleepest in, under and over.
He 's fair though a corse — a fair corse, like a sleeper.
Lay him soft in the silks he had pleasure to fold
When, beside thee at night, holy dreams deep and deeper
Enclosed his young life on the couch made of gold.
Love him still, poor Adonis; cast on him together
The crowns and the flowers: since he died from the place,
Why, let all die with him; let the blossoms go wither,
Rain myrtles and olive-buds down on his face.
Rain the myrrh down, let all that is best fall a-pining,
Since the myrrh of his life from thy keeping is swept.
Pale he lay, thine Adonis, in purples reclining;
The Loves raised their voices around him and wept.
They have shorn their bright curls off to cast on Adonis;
One treads on his bow, — on his arrows, another, —
One breaks up a well-feathered quiver, and one is
Bent low at a sandal, untying the strings,
And one carries the vases of gold from the springs,
While one washes the wound, — and behind them a brother
Fans down on the body sweet air with his wings.

VIII

Cytherea herself now the Loves are lamenting.
Each torch at the door Hymenæus blew out;
And, the marriage-wreath dropping its leaves as repenting,
No more 'Hymen, Hymen,' is chanted about,
But the *ai ai* instead — 'Ai alas !' is begun
For Adonis, and then follows 'Ai Hymenæus !'
The Graces are weeping for Cinyris's son,
Sobbing low each to each, 'His fair eyes cannot see us !'
Their wail strikes more shrill than the sadder Dioné's.
The Fates mourn aloud for Adonis, Adonis,
Deep chanting; he hears not a word that they say:
He *would* hear, but Persephoné has him in keeping.
— Cease moan, Cytherea ! leave pomps for to-day,
And weep new when a new year refits thee for weeping.

SONG OF THE ROSE

ATTRIBUTED TO SAPPHO

From 'Achilles Tatius'

If Zeus chose us a King of the flowers in his mirth,
He would call to the Rose and would royally crown it;
For the Rose, ho, the Rose ! is the grace of the earth,
Is the light of the plants that are growing upon it:
For the Rose, ho, the Rose ! is the eye of the flowers,
Is the blush of the meadows that feel themselves fair,
Is the lightning of beauty that strikes through the bowers
On pale lovers who sit in the glow unaware.
Ho, the Rose breathes of love ! ho, the Rose lifts the cup
To the red lips of Cypris invoked for a guest !
Ho, the Rose, having curled its sweet leaves for the world,
Takes delight in the motion its petals keep up,
As they laugh to the wind as it laughs from the west !

FROM THEOCRITUS

THE CYCLOPS

(IDYL XI)

AND so an easier life our Cyclops drew,
The ancient Polyphemus, who in youth
Loved Galatea while the manhood grew
Adown his cheeks and darkened round his mouth.
No jot he cared for apples, olives, roses;
Love made him mad: the whole world was neglected,
The very sheep went backward to their closes
From out the fair green pastures, self-directed.
And singing Galatea, thus, he wore
The sunrise down along the weedy shore,
And pined alone, and felt the cruel wound
Beneath his heart, which Cypris' arrow bore,
With a deep pang; but, so, the cure was found;
And sitting on a lofty rock he cast
His eyes upon the sea, and sang at last: —
'O whitest Galatea, can it be
That thou shouldst spurn me off who love thee so?
More white than curds, my girl, thou art to see,
More meek than lambs, more full of leaping glee
Than kids, and brighter than the early glow
On grapes that swell to ripen, — sour like thee!
Thou comest to me with the fragrant sleep,
And with the fragrant sleep thou goest from me;
Thou fliest . . . fliest, as a frightened sheep
Flies the gray wolf! — yet Love did overcome me,
So long, — I loved thee, maiden, first of all
When down the hills (my mother fast beside thee)
I saw thee stray to pluck the summer-fall
Of hyacinth bells, and went myself to guide thee:
And since my eyes have seen thee, they can leave thee
No more, from that day's light! But thou . . . by Zeus,
Thou wilt not care for *that*, to let it grieve thee!
I know thee, fair one, why thou springest loose
From my arm round thee. Why? I tell thee, Dear!
One shaggy eyebrow draws its smudging road
Straight through my ample front, from ear to ear, —
One eye rolls underneath; and yawning, broad
Flat nostrils feel the bulging lips too near.
Yet . . . ho, ho! — *I*, — whatever I appear, —
Do feed a thousand oxen! When I have done,
I milk the cows, and drink the milk that 's best!
I lack no cheese, while summer keeps the sun;
And after, in the cold, it 's ready prest!
And then, I know to sing, as there is none
Of all the Cyclops can, . . . a song of thee,
Sweet apple of my soul, on love's fair tree,
And of myself who love thee . . . till the West
Forgets the light, and all but I have rest.
I feed for thee, besides, eleven fair does,
And all in fawn; and four tame whelps of bears.
Come to me, Sweet! thou shalt have all of those
In change for love! I will not halve the shares.
Leave the blue sea, with pure white arms extended
To the dry shore; and, in my cave's recess,
Thou shalt be gladder for the noonlight ended, —
For here be laurels, spiral cypresses,
Dark ivy, and a vine whose leaves enfold
Most luscious grapes; and here is water cold,
The wooded Ætna pours down through the trees
From the white snows, — which gods were scarce too bold
To drink in turn with nectar. Who with these

Would choose the salt wave of the luke-warm seas?
Nay, look on me! If I am hairy and rough,
I have an oak's heart in me; there 's a fire
In these gray ashes which burns hot enough;
And when I burn for *thee*, I grudge the pyre
No fuel . . . not my soul, nor this one eye, —
Most precious thing I have, because thereby
I see thee, Fairest! Out, alas! I wish
My mother had borne me finnèd like a fish,
That I might plunge down in the ocean near thee,
And kiss thy glittering hand between the weeds,
If still thy face were turned; and I would bear thee
Each lily white, and poppy fair that bleeds
Its red heart down its leaves! — one gift, for hours
Of summer, — one, for winter; since, to cheer thee,
I could not bring at once all kinds of flowers.
Even now, girl, now, I fain would learn to swim,
If stranger in a ship sailed nigh, I wis, —
That I may know how sweet a thing it is
To live down with you in the Deep and Dim!
Come up, O Galatea, from the ocean,
And, having come, forget again to go!
As I, who sing out here my heart's emotion,
Could sit for ever. Come up from below!
Come, keep my flocks beside me, milk my kine, —
Come, press my cheese, distrain my whey and curd!
Ah, mother! she alone . . . that mother of mine . . .
Did wrong me sore! I blame her! — Not a word
Of kindly intercession did she address
Thine ear with for my sake; and ne'ertheless
She saw me wasting, wasting, day by day:
Both head and feet were aching, I will say,
All sick for grief, as I myself was sick.
O Cyclops, Cyclops, whither hast thou sent
Thy soul on fluttering wings? If thou wert bent
On turning bowls, or pulling green and thick
The sprouts to give thy lambkins, — thou wouldst make thee
A wiser Cyclops than for what we take thee.
Milk dry the present! Why pursue too quick
That future which is fugitive aright?
Thy Galatea thou shalt haply find, —
Or else a maiden fairer and more kind;
For many girls do call me through the night,
And, as they call, do laugh out silverly.
I, too, am something in the world, I see!'

While thus the Cyclops love and lambs did fold,
Ease came with song he could not buy with gold.

FROM APULEIUS

PSYCHE GAZING ON CUPID

(METAMORPH., LIB. IV.)

THEN Psyche, weak in body and soul, put on
The cruelty of Fate, in place of strength:
She raised the lamp to see what should be done,
And seized the steel, and was a man at length
In courage, though a woman! Yes, but when
The light fell on the bed whereby she stood
To view the '*beast*' that lay there, — certes, then,
She saw the gentlest, sweetest beast in wood —
Even Cupid's self, the beauteous god! more beauteous

For that sweet sleep across his eyelids dim.
The light, the lady carried as she viewed,
Did blush for pleasure as it lighted him,
The dagger trembled from its aim unduteous;
And *she* . . . oh, *she* — amazed and soul-distraught,
And fainting in her whiteness like a veil,
Slid down upon her knees, and, shuddering, thought
To hide — though in her heart — the dagger pale!
She would have done it, but her hands did fail
To hold the guilty steel, they shivered so, —
And feeble, exhausted, unawares she took
To gazing on the god, — till, look by look,
Her eyes with larger life did fill and glow.
She saw his golden head alight with curls, —
She might have guessed their brightness in the dark
By that ambrosial smell of heavenly mark!
She saw the milky brow, more pure than pearls,
The purple of the cheeks, divinely sundered
By the globed ringlets, as they glided free,
Some back, some forwards, — all so radiantly,
That, as she watched them there, she never wondered
To see the lamplight, where it touched them, tremble:
On the god's shoulders, too, she marked his wings
Shine faintly at the edges and resemble
A flower that 's near to blow. The poet sings
And lover sighs, that Love is fugitive;
And certes, though these pinions lay reposing,
The feathers on them seemed to stir and live
As if by instinct, closing and unclosing.
Meantime the god's fair body slumbered deep,
All worthy of Venus, in his shining sleep;
While at the bed's foot lay the quiver, bow,
And darts, — his arms of godhead. Psyche gazed
With eyes that drank the wonders in, — said, — 'Lo,
Be these my husband's arms?' — and straightway raised
An arrow from the quiver-case, and tried
Its point against her finger, — trembling till
She pushed it in too deeply (foolish bride!)
And made her blood some dewdrops small distil,
And learnt to love Love, of her own good-will.

PSYCHE WAFTED BY ZEPHYRUS

(METAMORPH., LIB. IV.)

WHILE Psyche wept upon the rock forsaken,
Alone, despairing, dreading, — gradually
By Zephyrus she was enwrapt and taken
Still trembling, — like the lilies planted high, —
Through all her fair white limbs. Her vesture spread,
Her very bosom eddying with surprise, —
He drew her slowly from the mountain-head,
And bore her down the valleys with wet eyes,
And laid her in the lap of a green dell
As soft with grass and flowers as any nest,
With trees beside her, and a limpid well:
Yet Love was not far off from all that Rest.

PSYCHE AND PAN

(METAMORPH., LIB. V.)

THE gentle River, in her Cupid's honor,
Because he used to warm the very wave,
Did ripple aside, instead of closing on her,

And cast up Psyche, with a refluence brave,
Upon the flowery bank, — all sad and sinning.
Then Pan, the rural god, by chance was leaning
Along the brow of waters as they wound,
Kissing the reed-nymph till she sank to ground,
And teaching, without knowledge of the meaning,
To run her voice in music after his
Down many a shifting note; (the goats around,
In wandering pasture and most leaping bliss,
Drawn on to crop the river's flowery hair).
And as the hoary god beheld her there,
The poor, worn, fainting Psyche! — knowing all
The grief she suffered, he did gently call
Her name, and softly comfort her despair: —

'O wise, fair lady, I am rough and rude
And yet experienced through my weary age!
And if I read aright, as soothsayer should,
Thy faltering steps of heavy pilgrimage,
Thy paleness, deep as snow we cannot see
The roses through, — thy sighs of quick returning,
Thine eyes that seem, themselves, two souls in mourning, —
Thou lovest, girl, too well, and bitterly!
But hear me: rush no more to a headlong fall:
Seek no more deaths! leave wail, lay sorrow down,
And pray the sovran god; and use withal
Such prayer as best may suit a tender youth,
Well-pleased to bend to flatteries from thy mouth,
And feel them stir the myrtle of his crown.'

— So spake the shepherd-god; and answer none
Gave Psyche in return: but silently
She did him homage with a bended knee,
And took the onward path. —

PSYCHE PROPITIATING CERES

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

THEN mother Ceres from afar beheld her,
While Psyche touched, with reverent fingers meek,
The temple's scythes; and with a cry compelled her: —
'O wretched Psyche, Venus roams to seek
Thy wandering footsteps round the weary earth,
Anxious and maddened, and adjures thee forth
To accept the imputed pang, and let her wreak
Full vengeance with full force of deity!
Yet *thou*, forsooth, art in my temple here,
Touching my scythes, assuming my degree,
And daring to have thoughts that are not fear!'
— But Psyche clung to her feet, and as they moved
Rained tears along their track, tear dropped on tear,
And drew the dust on in her trailing locks,
And still, with passionate prayer, the charge disproved: —
'Now, by thy right hand's gathering from the shocks
Of golden corn, — and by thy gladsome rites
Of harvest, — and thy consecrated sights
Shut safe and mute in chests, — and by the course
Of thy slave-dragons, — and the driving force
Of ploughs along Sicilian glebes profound, —
By thy swift chariot, — by thy steadfast ground, —
By all those nuptial torches that departed
With thy lost daughter, — and by those that shone
Back with her, when she came again glad-hearted, —
And by all other mysteries which are done
In silence at Eleusis, — I beseech thee,
O Ceres, take some pity, and abstain
From giving to my soul extremer pain
Who am the wretched Psyche! Let me teach thee

A little mercy, and have thy leave to spend
A few days only in thy garnered corn,
Until that wrathful goddess, at the end,
Shall feel her hate grow mild the longer borne, —
Or till, alas! — this faintness at my breast
Pass from me, and my spirit apprehend
From life-long woe a breath-time hour of rest!'
— But Ceres answered 'I am moved indeed
By prayers so moist with tears, and would defend
The poor beseecher from more utter need:
But where old oaths, anterior ties, commend,
I cannot fail to a sister, lie to a friend,
As Venus is to *me*. Depart with speed!'

PSYCHE AND THE EAGLE

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

BUT sovran Jove's rapacious Bird, the regal
High percher on the lightning, the great eagle,
Drove down with rushing wings; and, — thinking how,
By Cupid's help, he bore from Ida's brow
A cup-boy for his master, — he inclined
To yield, in just return, an influence kind;
The god being honored in his lady's woe.
And thus the Bird wheeled downward from the track,
Gods follow gods in, to the level low
Of that poor face of Psyche left in wrack.
— 'Now fie, thou simple girl!' the Bird began;
'For if thou think to steal and carry back
A drop of holiest stream that ever ran,
No simpler thought, methinks, were found in man.
What! know'st thou not these Stygian waters be
Most holy, even to Jove? that as, on earth,
Men swear by gods, and by the thunder's worth,
Even so the heavenly gods do utter forth
Their oaths by Styx's flowing majesty?
And yet, one little urnful, I agree
To grant thy need!' Whereat, all hastily,
He takes it, fills it from the willing wave,
And bears it in his beak, incarnadined
By the last Titan-prey he screamed to have;
And, striking calmly out, against the wind,
Vast wings on each side, — there, where Psyche stands,
He drops the urn down in her lifted hands.

PSYCHE AND CERBERUS

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

A MIGHTY dog with three colossal necks,
And heads in grand proportion; vast as fear,
With jaws that bark the thunder out that breaks
In most innocuous dread for ghosts anear,
Who are safe in death from sorrow: he reclines
Across the threshold of queen Proserpine's
Dark-sweeping halls, and, there, for Pluto's spouse,
Doth guard the entrance of the empty house.
When Psyche threw the cake to him, once amain
He howled up wildly from his hunger-pain,
And was still, after. —

PSYCHE AND PROSERPINE

(METAMORPH., LIB. VI.)

THEN Psyche entered in to Proserpine
In the dark house, and straightway did decline
With meek denial the luxurious seat,
The liberal board for welcome strangers spread,
But sat down lowly at the dark queen's feet,
And told her tale, and brake her oaten bread.
And when she had given the pyx in humble duty,
And told how Venus did entreat the queen
To fill it up with only one day's beauty
She used in Hades, star-bright and serene,
To beautify the Cyprian, who had been
All spoilt with grief in nursing her sick boy, —

Then Proserpine, in malice and in joy,
Smiled in the shade and took the pyx, and put
A secret in it; and so, filled and shut,
Gave it again to Psyche. Could she tell
It held no beauty, but a dream of hell?

PSYCHE AND VENUS

(Metamorph., Lib. VI.)

And Psyche brought to Venus what was sent
By Pluto's spouse; the paler, that she went
So low to seek it, down the dark descent.

MERCURY CARRIES PSYCHE TO OLYMPUS

(Metamorph., Lib. VI.)

Then Jove commanded the god Mercury
To float up Psyche from the earth. And she
Sprang at the first word, as the fountain springs,
And shot up bright and rustling through his wings.

MARRIAGE OF PSYCHE AND CUPID

(Metamorph., Lib. VI.)

And Jove's right hand approached the ambrosial bowl
To Psyche's lips, that scarce dared yet to smile, —
'Drink, O my daughter, and acquaint thy soul
With deathless uses, and be glad the while!
No more shall Cupid leave thy lovely side;
Thy marriage-joy begins for never-ending.'
While yet he spake, — the nuptial feast supplied, —
The bridegroom on the festive couch was bending
O'er Psyche in his bosom — Jove, the same,
On Juno, and the other deities,
Alike ranged round. The rural cup-boy came
And poured Jove's nectar out with shining eyes,
While Bacchus, for the others, did as much,
And Vulcan spread the meal; and all the Hours
Made all things purple with a sprinkle of flowers,
Or roses chiefly, not to say the touch
Of their sweet fingers; and the Graces glided
Their balm around, and the Muses, through the air,
Struck out clear voices, which were still divided
By that divinest song Apollo there
Intoned to his lute; while Aphroditè fair
Did float her beauty along the tune, and play
The notes right with her feet. And thus, the day
Through every perfect mood of joy was carried.
The Muses sang their chorus; Satyrus
Did blow his pipes; Pan touched his reed; — and thus
At last were Cupid and his Psyche married.

FROM NONNUS

HOW BACCHUS FINDS ARIADNE SLEEPING

(Dionysiaca, Lib. XLVII.)

When Bacchus first beheld the desolate
And sleeping Ariadne, wonder straight
Was mixed with love in his great golden eyes;
He turned to his Bacchantes in surprise,
And said with guarded voice, — 'Hush! strike no more
Your brazen cymbals; keep those voices still
Of voice and pipe; and since ye stand before
Queen Cypris, let her slumber as she will!
And yet the cestus is not here in proof.
A Grace, perhaps, whom sleep has stolen aloof: 10
In which case, as the morning shines in view,

Wake this Aglaia ! — yet in Naxos, who
Would veil a Grace so ? Hush ! And if that she
Were Hebe, which of all the gods can be
The pourer-out of wine ? or if we think
She 's like the shining moon by ocean's brink,
The guide of herds, — why, could she sleep without
Endymion's breath on her cheek ? or if I doubt
Of silver-footed Thetis, used to tread
These shores, — even *she* (in reverence be it said)
Has no such rosy beauty to dress deep
With the blue waves. The Loxian goddess might
Repose so from her hunting-toil aright
Beside the sea, since toil gives birth to sleep,
But who would find her with her tunic loose,
Thus ? Stand off, Thracian ! stand off ! Do not leap,
Not this way ! Leave that piping, since I choose,
O dearest Pan, and let Athenè rest !
And yet if she be Pallas . . . truly guessed . . .
Her lance is — where ? her helm and ægis — where ?'
— As Bacchus closed, the miserable Fair
Awoke at last, sprang upward from the sands,
And gazing wild on that wild throng that stands
Around, around her, and no Theseus there ! —
Her voice went moaning over shore and sea,
Beside the halcyon's cry; she called her love;
She named her hero, and raged maddeningly
Against the brine of waters; and, above,
Sought the ship's track, and cursed the hours she slept;
And still the chiefest execration swept
Against queen Paphia, mother of the ocean;
And cursed and prayed by times in her emotion
The winds all round. . . .

. . . .

Her grief did make her glorious; her despair
Adorned her with its weight. Poor wailing child !
She looked like Venus when the goddess smiled
At liberty of godship, debonair;
Poor Ariadne ! and her eyelids fair
Hid looks beneath them lent her by Persuasion.
And every Grace, with tears of Love's own passion
She wept long; then she spake: — 'Sweet sleep did come
While sweetest Theseus went. Oh, glad and dumb,
I wish he had left me still ! for in my sleep
I saw his Athens, and did gladly keep
My new bride-state within my Theseus' hall;
And heard the pomp of Hymen, and the call
Of " Ariadne, Ariadne," sung
In choral joy; and there, with joy I hung
Spring-blossoms round love's altar ! — ay, and wore
A wreath myself; and felt *him* evermore
Oh, evermore beside me, with his mighty
Grave head bowed down in prayer to Aphroditè !
Why, what a sweet, sweet dream ! *He* went with it,
And left me here unwedded where I sit !
Persuasion help me ! The dark night did make me
A brideship, the fair morning takes away;
My Love had left me when the Hour did wake me;
And while I dreamed of marriage, as I say,
And blest it well, my blessèd Theseus left me:
And thus the sleep, I loved so, has bereft me.
Speak to me, rocks, and tell my grief to-day,
Who stole my love of Athens ?' . . .

HOW BACCHUS COMFORTS ARIADNE

(Dionysiaca, Lib. XLVII.)

Then Bacchus' subtle speech her sorrow crossed :—
'O maiden, dost thou mourn for having lost

The false Athenian heart? and dost thou still
Take thought of Theseus, when thou mayst at will
Have Bacchus for a husband? Bacchus bright!
A god in place of mortal! Yes, and though
The mortal youth be charming in thy sight,
That man of Athens cannot strive below,
In beauty and valor, with my deity!
Thou 'lt tell me of the labyrinthine dweller,
The fierce man-bull he slew: I pray thee, be,
Fair Ariadne, the true deed's true teller,
And mention thy clue's help! because, forsooth,
Thine armed Athenian hero had not found
A power to fight on that prodigious ground,
Unless a lady in her rosy youth
Had lingered near him: not to speak the truth
Too definitely out till names be known —
Like Paphia's — Love's — and Ariadne's own.
Thou wilt not say that Athens can compare
With Æther, nor that Minos rules like Zeus,
Nor yet that Gnossus has such golden air
As high Olympus. Ha! for noble use
We came to Naxos! Love has well intended
To change thy bridegroom! Happy thou, defended
From entering in thy Theseus' earthly hall,
That thou mayst hear the laughters rise and fall
Instead, where Bacchus rules! Or wilt thou choose
A still-surpassing glory? — take it all, —
A heavenly house, Kronion's self for kin, —
A place where Cassiopea sits within
Inferior light, for all her daughter's sake,
Since Perseus, even amid the stars, must take
Andromeda in chains æthereal!
But *I* will wreathe *thee*, sweet, an astral crown,
And as my queen and spouse thou shalt be known —
Mine, the crown-lover's!' Thus, at length, he proved
His comfort on her; and the maid was moved;
And casting Theseus' memory down the brine,
She straight received the troth of her divine
Fair Bacchus; Love stood by to close the rite;
The marriage-chorus struck up clear and light,
Flowers sprouted fast about the chamber green,
And with spring-garlands on their heads, I ween,
The Orchomenian dancers came along
And danced their rounds in Naxos to the song.
A Hamadryad sang a nuptial dit
Right shrilly: and a Naiad sat beside
A fountain, with her bare foot shelving it,
And hymned of Ariadne, beauteous bride,
Whom thus the god of grapes had deified.
Ortygia sang out, louder than her wont,
An ode which Phœbus gave her to be tried,
And leapt in chorus, with her steadfast front,
While prophet Love, the stars have called a brother,
Burnt in his crown, and twined in one another
His love-flower with the purple roses, given
In type of that new crown assigned in heaven.

FROM HESIOD

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

(THEOG. 947.)

THE golden-hairèd Bacchus did espouse
That fairest Ariadne, Minos' daughter,
And made her wifehood blossom in the house;
Where such protective gifts Kronion brought her,
Nor Death nor Age could find her when they sought her.

FROM EURIPIDES

AURORA AND TITHONUS

(Troades, Antistrophe, 853)

Love, Love, who once didst pass the Dardan portals,
Because of Heavenly passion!
Who once didst lift up Troy in exultation,
To mingle in thy bond the high Immortals! —
Love, turned from his own name
To Zeus's shame,
Can help no more at all.
And Eos' self, the fair, white-steeded Morning, —
Her light which blesses other lands, returning,
Has changed to a gloomy pall!
She looked across the land with eyes of amber, —
She saw the city's fall, —
She who, in pure embraces,
Had held there, in the hymeneal chamber,
Her children's father, bright Tithonus old,
Whom the four steeds with starry brows and paces
Bore on, snatched upward, on the car of gold,
And with him, all the land's full hope of joy!
The love-charms of the gods are vain for Troy.

FROM HOMER

HECTOR AND ANDROMACHE

(Iliad, Lib. VI.)

She rushed to meet him: the nurse following
Bore on her bosom the unsaddened child,
A simple babe, prince Hector's well-loved son,
Like a star shining when the world is dark.
Scamandrius, Hector called him; but the rest
Named him Astyanax, the city's prince,
Because that Hector only had saved Troy.
He, when he saw his son, smiled silently;
While, dropping tears, Andromache pressed on,
And clung to his hand, and spake, and named his name.

'Hector, my best one, — thine own nobleness
Must needs undo thee. Pity hast thou none
For this young child, and this most sad myself,
Who soon shall be thy widow — since that soon
The Greeks will slay thee in the general rush —
And then, for me, what refuge, 'reft of *thee*,
But to go graveward? Then, no comfort more
Shall touch me, as in the old sad times thou know'st —
Grief only — grief! I have no father now,
No mother mild! Achilles the divine,
He slew my father, sacked his lofty Thebes,
Cilicia's populous city, and slew its king,
Eëtion — father! — did not spoil the corse,
Because the Greek revered him in his soul,
But burnt the body with its dædal arms,
And poured the dust out gently. Round that tomb
The Oreads, daughters of the goat-nursed Zeus,
Tripped in a ring, and planted their green elms.
There were seven brothers with me in the house,
Who all went down to Hades in one day, —
For *he* slew all, Achilles the divine,
Famed for his swift feet, — slain among their herds
Of cloven-footed bulls and flocking sheep!
My mother too, who queened it o'er the woods
Of Hippoplacia, he, with other spoil,
Seized, — and, for golden ransom, freed too late, —
Since, as she went home, arrowy Artemis
Met her and slew her at my father's door.
But — oh my Hector, — thou art still to me
Father and mother! — yes, and brother dear,
O thou, who art my sweetest spouse beside!
Come now, and take me into pity! Stay
I' the town here with us! Do not make thy child
An orphan, nor a widow thy poor wife!

Call up the people to the fig-tree, where
The city is most accessible, the wall
Most easy of assault! — for thrice thereby
The boldest Greeks have mounted to the breach, —
Both Ajaxes, the famed Idomeneus,
Two sons of Atreus, and the noble one
Of Tydeus, — whether taught by some wise seer,
Or by their own souls prompted and inspired.'

Great Hector answered: — 'Lady, for these things
It is my part to care. And *I* fear most
My Trojans, and their daughters, and their wives,
Who through their long veils would glance scorn at me
If, coward-like, I shunned the open war.
Nor doth my own soul prompt me to that end!
I learnt to be a brave man constantly,
And to fight foremost where my Trojans fight,
And vindicate my father's glory and mine —
Because I know, by instinct and my soul,
The day comes that our sacred Troy must fall,
And Priam and his people. Knowing which,
I have no such grief for all my Trojans' sake,
For Hecuba's, for Priam's, our old king,
Not for my brothers', who so many and brave
Shall bite the dust before our enemies, —
As, sweet for *thee!* — to think some mailèd Greek
Shall lead thee weeping and deprive thy life
Of the free sun-sight — that, when gone away
To Argos, thou shalt throw the distaff there,
Not for thy uses — or shalt carry instead
Upon thy loathing brow, as heavy as doom,
The water of Greek wells — Messeis' own,
Or Hyperea's! — that some stander-by,
Marking my tears fall, shall say, "This is She,
The wife of that same Hector who fought best
Of all the Trojans, when all fought for Troy" —
Ay! — and, so speaking, shall renew thy pang
That, 'reft of Him so named, thou shouldst survive
To a slave's life! But earth shall hide my corse
Ere that shriek sound, wherewith thou art dragged from Troy.'

Thus Hector spake, and stretched his arms to his child.
Against the nurse's breast, with childly cry,
The boy clung back, and shunned his father's face,
And feared the glittering brass and waving hair
Of the high helmet, nodding horror down.
The father smiled, the mother could not choose
But smile too. Then he lifted from his brow
The helm, and set it on the ground to shine:
Then, kissed his dear child — raised him with both arms,
And thus invoked Zeus and the general gods: —

'Zeus, and all godships! grant this boy of mine
To be the Trojans' help, as I myself, —
To live a brave life and rule well in Troy!
Till men shall say, "The son exceeds the sire
By a far glory." Let him bring home spoil
Heroic, and make glad his mother's heart.'

With which prayer, to his wife's extended arms
He gave the child; and she received him straight
To her bosom's fragrance — smiling up her tears.
Hector gazed on her till his soul was moved;
Then softly touched her with his hand and spake.
'My best one — 'ware of passion and excess
In any fear. There 's no man in the world
Can send me to the grave apart from fate, —

And no man . . . Sweet, I tell thee . . . can fly fate —
No good nor bad man. Doom is self-fulfilled.
But now, go home, and ply thy woman's task 110
Of wheel and distaff! bid thy maidens haste
Their occupation. War 's a care for men —
For all men born in Troy, and chief for me.'
Thus spake the noble Hector, and resumed
His crested helmet, while his spouse went home;
But as she went, still looked back lovingly,
Dropping the tears from her reverted face.

THE DAUGHTERS OF PANDARUS

(ODYSS., LIB. XX.)

AND so these daughters fair of Pandarus
The whirlwinds took. The gods had slain their kin:
They were left orphans in their father's house.
And Aphroditè came to comfort them
With incense, luscious honey, and fragrant wine;
And Herè gave them beauty of face and soul
Beyond all women; purest Artemis
Endowed them with her stature and white grace;
And Pallas taught their hands to flash along
Her famous looms. Then, bright with deity,
Toward far Olympus, Aphroditè went
To ask of Zeus (who has his thunder-joys
And his full knowledge of man's mingled fate)
How best to crown those other gifts with love
And worthy marriage: but, what time she went,
The ravishing Harpies snatched the maids away,
And gave them up, for all their loving eyes,
To serve the Furies who hate constantly.

ANOTHER VERSION

So the storms bore the daughters of Pandarus out into thrall —
The gods slew their parents; the orphans were left in the hall.
And there, came, to feed their young lives, Aphroditè divine,
With the incense, the sweet-tasting honey, the sweet-smelling wine;
Herè brought them her wit above woman's, and beauty of face;
And pure Artemis gave them her stature, that form might have grace:
And Athenè instructed their hands in her works of renown;
Then, afar to Olympus, divine Aphroditè moved on:
To complete other gifts, by uniting each girl to a mate,
She sought Zeus, who has joy in the thunder and knowledge of fate,
Whether mortals have good chance or ill. But the Harpies a-late
In the storm came, and swept off the maidens, and gave them to wait,
With that love in their eyes, on the Furies who constantly hate.

FROM ANACREON

ODE TO THE SWALLOW

THOU indeed, little Swallow,
A sweet yearly comer,
Art building a hollow
New nest every summer,
And straight dost depart
Where no gazing can follow,
Past Memphis, down Nile!
Ah! but Love all the while
Builds his nest in my heart,
Through the cold winter-weeks:
And as one Love takes flight,
Comes another, O Swallow,
In an egg warm and white,
And another is callow.
And the large gaping beaks
Chirp all day and all night:
And the Loves who are older
Help the young and the poor Loves,
And the young Loves grown bolder
Increase by the score Loves —

Why, what can be done?
If a noise comes from one
Can I bear all this rout of a hundred and more Loves?

FROM HEINE

THE LAST TRANSLATION

Rome, 1860

I

I

Out of my own great woe
I make my little songs,
Which rustle their feathers in throngs
And beat on her heart even so.

II

They found the way, for their part,
Yet come again, and complain:
Complain, and are not fain
To say what they saw in her heart.

II

I

Art thou indeed so adverse?
Art thou so changed indeed?
Against the woman who wrongs me
I cry to the world in my need.

II

O recreant lips unthankful,
How could ye speak evil, say,
Of the man who so well has kissed you
On many a fortunate day?

III

I

My child, we were two children,
Small, merry by childhood's law;
We used to crawl to the hen-house
And hide ourselves in the straw.

II

We crowed like cocks, and whenever
The passers near us drew —
Cock-a-doodle! they thought
'T was a real cock that crew.

III

The boxes about our courtyard
We carpeted to our mind,
And lived there both together —
Kept house in a noble kind.

IV

The neighbor's old cat often
Came to pay us a visit;
We made her a bow and curtsey,
Each with a compliment in it.

V

After her health we asked
Our care and regard to evince —
(We have made the very same speeches
To many an old cat since).

VI

We also sat and wisely
Discoursed, as old folk do,
Complaining how all went better
In those good times we knew, —

VII

How love and truth and believing
Had left the world to itself,
And how so dear was the coffee,
And how so rare was the pelf.

VIII

The children's games are over,
The rest is over with youth —
The world, the good games, the good times,
The belief, and the love, and the truth.

IV

I

Thou lovest me not, thou lovest me not!
'T is scarcely worth a sigh:
Let me look in thy face, and no king in his place
Is a gladder man than I.

II

Thou hatest me well, thou hatest me well —
Thy little red mouth has told:
Let it reach me a kiss, and, however it is,
My child, I am well consoled.

V

I

My own sweet Love, if thou in the grave,
The darksome grave, wilt be,
Then will I go down by the side, and crave
Love-room for thee and me.

II

I kiss and caress and press thee wild,
Thou still, thou cold, thou white!
I wail, I tremble, and weeping mild,
Turn to a corpse at the right.

III

The Dead stand up, the midnight calls,
They dance in airy swarms —
We two keep still where the grave-shade falls,
And I lie on in thine arms.

IV

The Dead stand up, the Judgment-day
Bids such to weal or woe —
But nought shall trouble us where we stay
Embraced and embracing below.

VI

I

The years they come and go,
The races drop in the grave,
Yet never the love doth so
Which here in my heart I have.

II

Could I see thee but once, one day,
And sink down so on my knee,
And die in thy sight while I say,
'Lady, I love but thee!'

APPENDIX

I. JUVENILIA

I

THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

On October 5, 1843, Elizabeth Barrett wrote as follows to Mr. R. H. Horne, who had requested biographical details for the sketch which he wished to embody in *A New Spirit of the Age*, concerning her first considerable poetical production: 'My great epic of eleven or twelve years old, in four books, and called *The Battle of Marathon*, and of which fifty copies were printed because papa was bent upon spoiling me, is simply Pope's Homer done over again, or rather undone; for although a curious production for a child, it gives evidence only of an imitative faculty, and an ear, and a good deal of reading in a peculiar direction.' This privately printed edition dedicated to the father of the poetess (LONDON: printed for W. Lindsell, 87 Wimpole St., Cavendish Square, 1820) was first reprinted for publication in London in 1891.

BOOK I

THE war of Greece with Persia's haughty King,
No vulgar strain, eternal Goddess, sing!
What dreary ghosts to glutted Pluto fled,
What nations suffered, and what heroes bled:
Sing Asia's powerful Prince, who envious saw
The fame of Athens, and her might in war;
And scorns her power, at Cytherea's call
Her ruin plans, and meditates her fall;
How Athens, blinded to the approaching chains
By Vulcan's artful spouse, unmoved remains;
Deceived by Venus thus, unconquered Greece
Forgot her glories in the lap of peace;
While Asia's realms, and Asia's lord prepare
T' ensnare her freedom, by the wiles of war:
Hippias t' exalt upon th' Athenian throne,
Where once Pisistratus his father shone.
For yet her son Æneas' wrongs impart
Revenge and grief to Cytherea's heart;
And still from smoking Troy's once sacred wall,
Does Priam's reeking shade for vengeance call.
Minerva saw, and Paphia's Queen defied,
A boon she begged, nor Jove the boon denied;
That Greece should rise, triumphant o'er her foe,
Disarm th' invaders, and their power o'erthrow.
Her prayer obtained, the blue-eyed Goddess flies
As the fierce eagle, thro' the radiant skies.
To Aristides then she stood confessed,
Shews Persia's arts, and fires his warlike breast:
Then pours celestial ardor o'er his frame
And points the way to glory and to fame.
Awe struck the Chief, and swells his troubled soul,
In pride and wonder thoughts progressive roll.
He inly groaned and smote his laboring breast,
At once by Pallas, and by care opprest.
Inspired he moved, earth echoed where he trod,
All full of Heaven, all burning with the God.
Th' Athenians viewed with awe the mighty man,
To whom the Chief impassioned thus began:
'Hear, all ye Sons of Greece! Friends, Fathers, hear!
The Gods command it, and the Gods revere!
No madness mine, for mark, oh favored Greeks!
That by my mouth the martial Goddess speaks!
This know, Athenians, that proud Persia now
Prepares to twine thy laurels on her brow;
Behold her princely Chiefs their weapons wield
By Venus fired, and shake the brazen shield.
I hear their shouts that echo to the skies,
I see their lances blaze, their banners rise,
I hear the clash of arms, the battle's roar,
And all the din and thunder of the war!
I know that Greeks shall purchase just renown,
And fame impartial, shall Athena crown.
Then Greeks, prepare your arms! award the yoke,
Thus Jove commands'—sublime the hero spoke;
The Greeks assent with shouts, and rend the skies
With martial clamor, and tumultuous cries.
So struggling winds with rage indignant sweep
The azure waters of the silent deep,
Sudden the seas rebellowing, frightful rise,
And dash their foaming surges to the skies;
Burst the firm sand, and boil with dreadful roar,

Lift their black waves, and combat with the shore.
So each brave Greek in thought aspires to fame,
Stung by his words, and dread of future shame;
Glory's own fires within their bosom rise
And shouts tumultuous thunder to the skies.

But Love's celestial Queen resentful saw
The Greeks (by Pallas warned) prepare for war;
Th' indignant Goddess of the Paphian bower
Deceives Themistocles with heavenly power;
The hero rising spoke, 'Oh rashly blind,
What sudden fury thus has seized thy mind?
Boy as thou art, such empty dreams beware!
Shall we, for griefs and wars unsought, prepare?
The will of mighty Jove, whate'er it be,
Obey, and own th' Omnipotent decree.
If our disgrace and fall the fates employ,
Why did we triumph o'er perfidious Troy?
Why, say, oh Chief, in that eventful hour
Did Grecian heroes crush Dardanian power?'
Him eyeing sternly, thus the Greek replies,
Renowned for truth, and as Minerva wise,
'Oh Son of Greece, no heedless boy am I,
Despised in battle's toils, nor first to fly,
Nor dreams or phrenzy call my words astray,
The heaven-sent mandate pious I obey.
If Pallas did not all my words inspire,
May heaven pursue me with unceasing ire!
But if (oh grant my prayer, almighty Jove)
I bear a mandate from the Courts above,
Then thro' yon heaven, let awful thunder roar
Till Greeks believe my mission, and adore!'

He ceased — and thro' the host one murmur ran,
With eyes transfixed upon the godlike man.
But hark! o'er earth expands the solemn sound,
It lengthening grows — heaven's azure vaults resound,
While peals of thunder beat the echoing ground.
Prostrate, convinc'd, divine Themistocles
Embraced the hero's hands, and clasped his knees:
'Behold me here,' (the awe-struck Chieftain cries
While tears repentant glisten in his eyes,)
'Behold me here, thy friendship to entreat,
Themistocles, a suppliant at thy feet.
Before no haughty despot's royal throne
This knee has bent — it bends to thee alone
Thy mission to adore, thy truth to own.
Behold me Jove, and witness what I swear
By all on earth I love, by all in heav'n I fear,
Some fiend inspired my words, of dark design,
Some fiend concealed beneath a robe divine;
Then aid me in my prayer, ye Gods above,
Bid Aristides give me back his love!'
He spake and wept; benign the godlike man
Felt tears descend and paused, then thus began.
'Thrice worthy Greek, for this shall we contend?
Ah no! I feel thy worth, thou more than friend,
Pardon sincere, Themistocles, receive;
The heart declares 't is easy to forgive.'
He spake divine, his eye with Pallas burns,
He spoke and sighed, and sighed and wept by turns.
Themistocles beheld the Chief oppress,
Awe-struck he paused, then rushed upon his breast,
Whom sage Miltiades with joy addressed.
'Hero of Greece, worthy a hero's name
Adored by Athens, fav'rite child of fame!
Glory's own spirit does with truth combine
To form a soul, so godlike, so divine!
Oh Aristides rise, our Chief! to save
The fame, the might of Athens from the grave.
Nor then refuse thy noble arm to lend
To guard Athena, and her state defend.
First I, obedient, 'customed homage pay
To own a hero's and a leader's sway.'
He said, and would have knelt; the man divine
Perceived his will, and stayed the Sire's design.
'Not mine, oh Sage, to lead this gallant band,'
He generous said, and grasped his aged hand,
'Proud as I am in glory's arms to rise,
Athenian Greeks, to shield your liberties,
Yet 't is not mine to lead your powerful state,
Enough it is to tempt you to be great;
Be 't for Miltiades, experienced sage,
To curb your ardor, and restrain your rage,
Your souls to temper — by his skill prepare
To succor Athens, and conduct the war.
More fits my early youth to purchase fame,
By deeds in arms t' immortalize my name.'
Firmly he spake, his words the Greek inspire,
And all were hushed to listen and admire.
The Sage thus — 'Most Allied to Gods! the fame,
The pride, the glory of the Grecian name,
E'en by thee, Chief, I swear, to whom is given
The sacred mandate of yon marble heaven —
To lead, not undeserving of thy love,
T' avert the yoke, if so determines Jove.'
Amidst the host imagination rose
And paints the combat, but disdains the woes.
And heaven-born fancy, with dishevelled hair,
Points to the ensanguined field, and victory there.
But soon, too soon, these empty dreams are driven
Forth from their breasts — but soothing hope is given,
Hope sprung from Jove, man's sole, and envied heav'n.
Then all his glory, Aristides felt,
And begged the Chieftain's blessing as he knelt:
Miltiades his pious arms outspread,
Called Jove's high spirit on the hero's head.
Nor called unheard — sublime in upper air

The bird of Jove appeared to bless his prayer.
Lightning he breathed, not harsh, not fiercely bright,
But one pure stream of heaven-collected light:
Jove's sacred smile lulls every care to rest,
Calms every woe, and gladdens every breast.
But what shrill blast thus bursts upon the ear;
What banners rise, what heralds' forms appear?
That haughty mien, and that commanding face
Bespeak them Persians, and of noble race;
One on whose hand Darius' signet beamed,
Superior to the rest, a leader seemed,
With brow contracted, and with flashing eye
Thus threatening spoke, in scornful majesty:
'Know Greeks that I, a sacred herald, bring
The awful mandate of the Persian King,
To force allegiance from the Sons of Greece,
Then earth and water give, nor scorn his peace.
For, if for homage, back reproof I bear,
To meet his wrath, his vengeful wrath, prepare,
For not in vain ye scorn his dread command
When Asia's might comes thundering in his hand.'
To whom Miltiades with kindling eye,
'We scorn Darius, and his threats defy;
And now, proud herald, shall we stoop to shame?
Shall Athens tremble at a tyrant's name?
Persian away! such idle dreams forbear,
And shun our anger and our vengeance fear.'
'Oh! vain thy words,' the herald fierce began;
'Thrice vain thy dotaged words, oh powerless man.
Sons of a desert, hoping to withstand
All the joint forces of Darius' hand,
Fools, fools, the King of millions to defy,
For freedom's empty name, to ask to die!
Yet stay, till Persia's powers their banners rear,
Then shall ye learn our forces to revere,
And ye, oh impotent, shall deign to fear!'
To whom great Aristides: rising ire
Boiled in his breast, and set his soul on fire:
'Oh wretch accurst,' the hero cried, 'to seek
T' insult experienced age, t' insult a Greek!
Inglorious slave! whom truth and heaven deny,
Unfit to live, yet more unfit to die:
But, trained to pass the goblet at the board
And servile kiss the footsteps of thy lord,
Whose wretched life no glorious deeds beguile,
Who lives upon the semblance of a smile,
Die! thy base shade to gloomy regions fled,
Join there the shivering phantoms of the dead.
Base slave, return to dust' — his victim then
In fearful accents cried, 'Oh best of men,
Most loved of Gods, most merciful, most just,
Behold me humbled, grovelling in the dust:
Not mine th' offence, the mandate stern I bring
From great Darius, Asia's tyrant King.
Oh strike not, Chief, not mine the guilt, not mine,
Ah o'er those brows severe, let mercy shine,
So dear to heav'n, of origin divine!
Tributes, lands, gold, shall wealthy Persia give,
All, and yet more, but bid me, wretched, live!'
He trembling, thus persuades with fond entreat
And nearer prest, and clasped the hero's feet.
Forth from the Grecian's breast, all rage is driv'n,
He lifts his arms, his eyes, his soul to heav'n.
'Hear, Jove omnipotent, all wise, all great,
To whom all fate is known; whose will is fate;
Hear thou all-seeing one, hear Sire divine,
Teach me thy will, and be thy wisdom mine!
Behold this suppliant! life or death decree;
Be thine the judgment, for I bend to thee.'
And thus the Sire of Gods and men replies,
While pealing thunder shakes the groaning skies.
The awful voice thro' spheres unknown was driv'n
Resounding thro' the dark'ning realms of heaven.
Aloft in air sublime the echo rode,
And earth resounds the glory of the God:
'Son of Athena, let the coward die,
And his pale ghost, to Pluto's empire fly;
Son of Athena, our command obey,
Know thou our might, and then adore our sway.'
Th' Almighty spake — the heavens convulsive start,
From the black clouds the whizzing lightnings dart
And dreadful dance along the troubled sky
Struggling with fate in awful mystery.
The hero heard, and Jove his breast inspired
Nor now by pity touched, but anger fired;
While his big heart within his bosom burns,
Off from his feet the clinging slave he spurns.
Vain were his cries, his prayers 'gainst fate above,
Jove wills his fall, and who can strive with Jove?
To whom the hero — 'Hence to Pluto's sway,
To realms of night, ne'er lit by Cynthia's ray,
Hence, from yon gulph the earth and water bring
And crown with victory your mighty King.'
He said — and where the gulph of death appeared
Where raging waves, with rocks sublimely reared,
He hurled the wretch at once of hope bereaved;
Struggling he fell, the roaring flood received.
E'en now for life his shrieks, his groans implore,
And now death's latent agony is o'er,
He struggling sinks, and sinks to rise no more.
The train amaz'd, behold their herald die,
And Greece in arms — they tremble and they fly;
So some fair herd upon the verdant mead
See by the lion's jaws their foremost bleed,
Fearful they fly, lest what revolving fate
Had doomed their leader, should themselves await.
Then shouts of glorious war, and fame resound,
Athena's brazen gates receive the lofty sound.

But she whom Paphia's radiant climes adore
From her own bower the work of Pallas saw:
Tumultuous thoughts within her bosom rise,
She calls her car, and at her will it flies.
Th' eternal car with gold celestial burns,
Its polished wheel on brazen axle turns:
This to his spouse by Vulcan's self was given
An offering worthy of the forge of heav'n.
The Goddess mounts the seat, and seized the reins,
The doves celestial cut the aerial plains,
Before the sacred birds and car of gold
Self-moved the radiant gates of heav'n unfold.
She then dismounts, and thus to mighty Jove
Begins the Mother and the Queen of Love.
'And is it thus, oh Sire, that fraud should spring
From the pure breast of heaven's eternal King?
Was it for this, Saturnius' word was given
That Greece should fall 'mong nations curst of heaven?
Thou swore by hell's black flood, and heaven above,
Is this, oh say, is this the faith of Jove?
Behold stern Pallas, Athens' Sons alarms,
Darius' herald crushed, and Greece in arms.
E'en now behold her crested streamers fly,
Each Greek resolved to triumph or to die:
Ah me unhappy! when shall sorrow cease;
Too well I know the fatal might of Greece;
Was 't not enough, imperial Troy should fall,
That Argive hands should raze the god-built wall?
Was 't not enough Anchises' Son should roam
Far from his native shore and much loved home?
All this unconscious of thy fraud I bore,
For thou, oh Sire, t' allay my vengeance, swore
That Athens towering in her might should fall
And Rome should triumph on her prostrate wall;
But oh, if haughty Greece should captive bring
The great Darius, Persia's mighty King,
What power her pride, what power her might shall move?
Not e'en the Thunderer, not eternal Jove,
E'en to thy heav'n shall rise her towering fame,
And prostrate nations will adore her name.
Rather on me thy instant vengeance take
Than all should fall for Cytherea's sake!
Oh! hurl me flaming in the burning lake,
Transfix me there unknown to Olympian calm,
Launch thy red bolt, and bare thy crimson arm.
I 'd suffer all — more — bid my woes increase
To hear but one sad groan from haughty Greece.'
She thus her grief with fruitless rage expressed,
And pride and anger swelled within her breast.
But he whose thunders awe the troubled sky
Thus mournful spake, and curbed the rising sigh:
'And it is thus celestial pleasures flow?
E'en here shall sorrow reach and mortal woe?
Shall strife the heavenly powers for ever move
And e'en insult the sacred ear of Jove?
Know, oh rebellious, Greece shall rise sublime
In fame the first, nor, daughter, mine the crime,
In valor foremost, and in virtue great,
Fame's highest glories shall attend her state.
So fate ordains, nor all my boasted power
Can raise those virtues, or those glories low'r:
But rest secure, destroying time must come
And Athens' self must own imperial Rome.'
Then the great Thunderer, and with visage mild,
Shook his ambrosial curls before his child,
And bending awful gave the eternal nod;
Heav'n quaked, and fate adored the parent God.
Joy seized the Goddess of the smiles and loves,
Nor longer, care, her heavenly bosom moves.
Hope rose, and o'er her soul its powers displayed,
Nor checked by sorrow, nor by grief dismayed.
She thus — 'Oh thou, whose awful thunders roll
Thro' heaven's etherial vaults and shake the Pole,
Eternal Sire, so wonderfully great,
To whom is known the secret page of fate,
Say, shall great Persia, next to Rome most dear
To Venus' breast, shall Persia learn to fear?
Say, shall her fame, and princely glories cease?
Shall Persia, servile, own the sway of Greece?'
To whom the Thunderer bent his brow divine
And thus in accents heavenly and benign;
'Daughter, not mine the secrets to relate,
The mysteries of all-revolving fate.
But ease thy breast; enough for thee to know,
What powerful fate decrees, will Jove bestow!'
He then her griefs, and anxious woes beguiled,
And in his sacred arms embraced his child.
Doubt clouds the Goddess' breast — she calls her car,
And lightly sweeps the liquid fields of air.
When sable night midst silent nature springs,
And o'er Athena shakes her drowsy wings,
The Paphian Goddess from Olympus flies,
And leaves the starry senate of the skies;
To Athens' heaven-blest towers, the Queen repairs
To raise more sufferings, and to cause more cares;
The Pylian Sage she moved so loved by fame,
In face, in wisdom, and in voice the same.
Twelve Chiefs in sleep absorbed and grateful rest
She first beheld, and them she thus addrest.
'Immortal Chiefs,' the fraudful Goddess cries,
While all the hero kindled in her eyes,
'For you, these aged arms did I employ,
For you, we razed the sacred walls of Troy,
And now for you, my shivering shade is driven
From Pluto's dreary realms by urgent Heaven;
Then, oh be wise, nor tempt th' unequal fight
In open fields, but wait superior might
Within immortal Athens' sacred wall,
There strive, there triumph, nor there fear to fall;
To own the Thunderer's sway, then Greeks prepare.'
Benign she said, and melted into air.

BOOK II

When from the briny deep, the orient morn
Exalts her purple light, and beams unshorn;
And when the flaming orb of infant day

Glares o'er the earth, and re-illumes the sky;
The twelve deceived, with souls on fire arose,
While the false vision fresh in memory glows;
The Senate first they sought, whose lofty wall
Midst Athens rises, and o'ershadows all;
The pride of Greece, it lifts its front sublime
Unbent amidst the ravages of time:
High on their towering seats, the heroes found
The Chiefs of Athens solemn ranged around;
One of the twelve, the great Clombrotus, then,
Renowned for piety, and loved by men:
'Assembled heroes, Chief to Pallas dear,
All great in battle, and in virtue, hear!
When night with sable wings extended rose
And wrapt our weary limbs in sweet repose,
I and my friends, Cydoon famed in song,
Thelon the valiant, Herocles the strong,
Cleon and Thermosites, in battle great
By Pallas loved, and blest by partial fate,
To us and other six, while day toils steep
Our eyes in happy dreams, and grateful sleep,
The Pylian Sage appeared, but not as when
On Troy's last dust he stood, the pride of men;
Driven from the shore of Acheron he came
From lower realms to point the path to fame,
"Oh glorious Chiefs," the sacred hero said,
"For you and for your fame, all Troy has bled;
Hither for you, my shivering shade is driv'n
From Pluto's dreary realms by urgent Heav'n;
Then oh be wise, nor tempt th' unequal fight
In open field, but wait superior might
Within immortal Athens' sacred wall;
There strive, there triumph, nor there fear to fall!
To own the Thunderer's sway, then Greeks prepare."
Benign he said, and melted into air.
"Leave us not thus," I cried, "Oh Pylian Sage,
Experienced Nestor, famed for reverend age,
Say first, great hero, shall the trump of fame
Our glory publish, or disclose our shame?
Oh what are Athens' fates?" In vain I said;
E'en as I spoke the shadowy Chief had fled.
Then here we flew, to own the vision's sway
And heaven's decrees to adore and to obey.'
He thus — and as before the blackened skies,
Sound the hoarse breezes, murmuring as they rise,
So thro' th' assembled Greeks, one murmur rose,
One long dull echo lengthening as it goes.
Then all was hushed in silence — breathless awe
Opprest each tongue, and trembling they adore.
But now uprising from th' astonished Chiefs,
Divine Miltiades exposed his griefs.
For well the godlike warrior Sage had seen
The frauds deceitful of the Paphian Queen,
And feared for Greece, for Greece to whom is given
Eternal fame, the purest gift of heaven.
And yet he feared — the pious hero rose
Majestic in his sufferings, in his woes;
Grief clammed his tongue, but soon his spirit woke,
Words burst aloft, and all the Patriot spoke.
'Oh Athens, Athens! all the snares I view;
Thus shalt thou fall, and fall inglorious too!
Are all thy boasted dignities no more?
Is all thy might, are all thy glories o'er?
Oh woe on woe, unutterable grief!
Not Nestor's shade, that cursed phantom chief,
But in that reverend air, that lofty mien,
Behold the frauds of Love's revengeful Queen.
Not yet, her thoughts does vengeance cease t' employ;
Her son Æneas' wrongs, and burning Troy
Not yet forgotten lie within her breast,
Nor soothed by time, nor by despair deprest.
Greeks still extolled by glory and by fame,
For yet, oh Chiefs! ye bear a Grecian name,
If in these walls, these sacred walls we wait
The might of Persia, and the will of fate,
Before superior force will Athens fall
And one o'erwhelming ruin bury all.
Then in the open plain your might essay,
Rush on to battle, crush Darius' sway;
The frauds of Venus, warrior Greeks, beware,
Disdain the Persian foes, nor stoop to fear.'
This said, Clombrotus him indignant heard,
Nor felt his wisdom, nor his wrath he feared.
With rage the Chief, the godlike Sage beheld,
And passion in his stubborn soul rebelled.
'Thrice impious man,' th' infuriate Chieftain cries,
(Flames black and fearful, flashing from his eyes,)
'Where lies your spirit, Greeks? and can ye bow
To this proud upstart of your power so low?
What! does his aspect awe ye! is his eye
So full of haughtiness and majesty?
Behold the impious soul, that dares defy
The power of Gods and Sovereign of the sky!
And can your hands no sacred weapon wield,
To crush the tyrant, and your country shield?
On, Greeks! — your sons, your homes, your country free
From such usurping Chiefs and tyranny!'
He said, and grasped his weapon — at his words
Beneath the horizon gleamed ten thousand swords,
Ten thousand swords e'en in one instant raised,
Sublime they danced aloft, and midst the Senate blazed.
Nor wisdom checked, nor gratitude represt,
They rose, and flashed before the Sage's breast.
With pride undaunted, greatness unsubdued,
Gainst him in arms, the impetuous Greeks he viewed,
Unarmed, unawed, before th' infuriate bands,
Nor begged for life, nor stretched his suppliant hands.
He stood astounded, riveted, oppressed

By grief unspeakable, which swelled his breast;
Life, feeling, being, sense forgotten lie,
Buried in one wide waste of misery.
Can this be Athens! this her Senate's pride?
He asked but gratitude, — was this denied?
Tho' Europe's homage at his feet were hurled
Athens forsakes him — Athens was his world.
Unutterable woe! by anguish stung
All his full soul rushed heaving to his tongue,
And thoughts of power, of fame, of greatness o'er,
He cried 'Athenians!' and he could no more.
Awed by that voice of agony, that word,
Hushed were the Greeks, and sheathed the obedient sword,
They stood abashed — to them the ancient Chief
Began — and thus relieved his swelling grief:
'Athenians! warrior Greeks! my words revere!
Strike me, but listen — bid me die, but hear!
Hear not Clombrotus, when he bids you wait,
At Athens' walls, Darius and your fate;
I feel that Pallas' self, my soul inspires
My mind she strengthens, and my bosom fires;
Strike, Greeks! but hear me; think not to this heart
Yon thirsty swords, one breath of fear impart!
Such slavish, low born thoughts, to Greeks unknown,
A Persian feels, and cherishes alone!
Hear me, Athenians! hear me, and believe,
See Greece mistaken! e'en the Gods deceive.
But fate yet wavers — yet may wisdom move
These threatening woes and thwart the Queen of Love.
Obey my counsels, and invoke for aid
The cloud-compelling God, and blue-eyed maid;
I fear not for myself the silent tomb,
Death lies in every shape, and death must come.
But ah! ye mock my truth, traduce my fame,
Ye blast my honor, stigmatize my name!
Ye call me tyrant when I wish thee free,
Usurper, when I live but, Greece, for thee!'
And thus the Chief — and boding silence drowned
Each clam'rous tongue, and sullen reigned around.
'Oh Chief!' great Aristides first began,
'Mortal yet perfect, godlike and yet man!
Boast of ungrateful Greece! my prayer attend,
Oh! be my Chieftain, Guardian, Father, Friend!
And ye, oh Greeks! impetuous and abhorred,
Again presumptuous, lift the rebel sword,
Again your weapons raise, in hateful ire,
To crush the Leader, Hero, Patriot, Sire!
Not such was Greece, when Greeks united stood
To bathe perfidious Troy in hostile blood,
Not such were Greeks inspired by glory; then
As Gods they conquered, now they 're less than men!
Degenerate race! now lost to once loved fame,
Traitors to Greece, and to the Grecian name!
Who now your honors, who your praise will seek?
Who now shall glory in the name of Greek?
But since such discords your base souls divide,
Procure the lots, let Jove and Heaven decide.'
To him Clombrotus thus admiring cries,
'Thy thoughts how wondrous, and thy words how wise!
So let it be, avert the threatened woes,
And Jove be present, and the right disclose;
But give me, Sire of Gods and powers above,
The heavenly vision, and my truth to prove!
Give me t' avenge the breach of all thy laws,
T' avenge myself, then aid my righteous cause!
If this thou wilt, I 'll to thine altars lead
Twelve bulls which to thy sacred name shall bleed,
Six snow-white heifers of a race divine
Prostrate shall fall, and heap the groaning shrine.
Nor this the most — six rams that fearless stray
Untouched by man, for thee this arm shall slay.'
Thus prayed the Chief, with shouts the heavens resound;
Jove weighs the balance and the lots go round!
Declare, oh muse! for to thy piercing eyes
The book of fate irrevocably lies;
What lots leapt forth, on that eventful day
Who won, who lost, all seeing Goddess, say!
First great Clombrotus all his fortune tried
And strove with fate, but Jove his prayer denied.
Infuriate to the skies his arms are driven,
And raging thus upbraids the King of Heaven.
'Is this the virtue of the blest abodes,
And this the justice of the God of Gods?
Can he who hurls the bolt, and shakes the sky
The prayer of truth, unblemished truth, deny?
Has he no faith by whom the clouds are riven,
Who sits superior on the throne of Heaven?
No wonder earth-born men are prone to fall
In sin, or listen to dishonor's call,
When Gods, th' immortal Gods, transgress the laws
Of truth, and sin against a righteous cause.'
Furious he said, by anger's spirit fired,
Then sullen from the Senate walls retired.
'T is now Miltiades' stern fate to dare,
But first he lifts his pious soul in prayer.
'Daughter of Jove!' the mighty Chief began,
'Without thy wisdom, frail and weak is man.
A phantom Greece adores; oh show thy power,
And prove thy love in this eventful hour!
Crown all thy glory, all thy might declare!'
The Chieftain prayed, and Pallas heard his prayer.
Swayed by the presence of the power divine,
The fated lot, Miltiades, was thine!
That hour the swelling trump of partial fame
Diffused eternal glory on thy name!
'Daughter of Jove,' he cries, 'unconquered maid!
Thy power I own, and I confess thy aid,

For this twelve ewes upon thy shrine shall smoke
Of milk-white fleece, the comeliest of their flock.
While hecatombs and generous sacrifice
Shall fume and blacken half th' astonished skies.'
And thus the Chief — the shouting Greeks admire,
While truth's bright spirit sets their souls on fire.
Then thus Themistocles, 'Ye Grecian host,
Not now the time for triumph or for boast.
Now, Greeks! for graver toils your minds prepare,
Not for the strife, but council of the war.
Behold the sacred herald! sent by Greece
To Sparta's vales now hushed in leagues of peace;
Her Chiefs, to aid the common cause, t' implore,
And bid Darius shun the Argive shore;
Behold him here! then let the leader Greek
Command the bearer of our hopes to speak.'
And thus the Sage, 'Where'er the herald stands,
Bid him come forth, 't is Athens' Chief commands,
And bid him speak with freedom uncontrolled,
His thoughts deliver and his charge unfold.'
He said and sat — the Greeks impatient wait
The will of Sparta, and Athena's fate.
Silent they sat — so ere the whirlwinds rise
Ere billows foam and thunder to the skies,
Nature in death-like calm her breath suspends,
And hushed in silent awe, th' approaching storm attends.
Now midst the Senate's walls the herald stands:
'Ye Greeks,' he said, and stretched his sacred hands.
'Assembled heroes, ye Athenian bands,
And thou beloved of Jove, our Chief, oh Sage,
Renowned for wisdom, as renowned for age,
And all ye Chiefs in battle rank divine!
No joyful mission swayed by Pallas mine.
The hardy Spartans, with one voice declare
Their will to aid our freedom and our war,
Instant they armed, by zeal and impulse driven,
But on the plains of the mysterious heaven
Comets and fires were writ — and awful sign,
And dreadful omen of the wrath divine:
While threatened plagues upon their shores appear,
They curb their valor, all subdued by fear;
The oracles declare the will above,
And of the sister and the wife of Jove,
That not until the moon's bright course was o'er
The Spartan warriors should desert their shore.
Threats following threats succeed the mandate dire,
Plagues to themselves, and to their harvest fire.
The Spartan Chiefs desist, their march delay
To wait th' appointed hour and heaven obey.
Grief smote my heart, my hopes and mission vain;
Their town I quitted for my native plain,
And when an eminence I gained, in woe
I gazed upon the verdant fields below,
Where nature's ample reign extending wide,
Displays her graces with commanding pride;
Where cool Eurotas winds her limpid floods
Thro' verdant valleys, and thro' shady woods;
And crowned in majesty o'ertowering all
In bright effulgence, Sparta's lofty wall.
To these I looked farewell, and humbled, bowed
In chastened sorrow, to the thundering God.
'T was thus I mused, when from a verdant grove
That wafts delicious perfume from above,
The monster Pan his form gigantic reared,
And dreadful to my awe-struck sight appeared.
I hailed the God who reigns supreme below,
Known by the horns that started from his brow;
Up to the hips a goat, but man's his face
Tho' grim, and stranger to celestial grace.
Within his hand a shepherd's crook he bore
The gift of Dian, on th' Arcadian shore;
Before th' immortal power I, fearing, bowed
Congealed with dread, and thus addressed the God:
"Comes Hermes' Son, as awful as his Sire,
To vent upon the Greeks immortal ire?
Is 't not enough, the mandate stern I bring
From Sparta's Chiefs, and Sparta's royal King,
That heaven enjoins them to refrain from fight
Till Dian fills again her horns with light?
Then vain their aid, ere then may Athens fall
And Persia's haughty Chiefs invest her wall."
I said and sighed, the God in accents mild
My sorrow thus and rigid griefs beguiled:
"Not to destroy I come, oh chosen Greek,
Not Athens' fall, but Athens' fame I seek.
Then give again to honor and to fame
My power despised, and my forgotten name.
At Sparta's doom, no longer, Chief, repine,
But learn submission to the will divine;
Behold e'en now, within this fated hour
On Marathonian plains, the Persian power!
E'en Hippias' self inspires th' embattled host,
Th' Athenian's terror, as the Persian's boast.
Bid Athens rise and glory's powers attest.
Enough — no more — the fates conceal the rest."
He said, his visage burned with heavenly light;
He spoke and, speaking, vanished from my sight;
And awed, I sought where those loved walls invite.
But think not, warrior Greeks, the fault is mine,
If Athens fall — it is by wrath divine.
I vainly, vainly grieve, the evil springs
From him — the God of Gods, the King of Kings!'
The Herald said, and bent his sacred head,
While cherished hope from every bosom fled.
Each dauntless hero, by despair deprest
Felt the deep sorrow, swelling in his breast.

They mourn for Athens, friendless and alone;
Cries followed cries, and groan succeeded groan.
Th' Athenian matrons, startled at the sound,
Rush from their looms and anxious crowd around.
They ask the cause, the fatal cause is known
By each fond sigh, and each renewing groan,
While in their arms some infant love they bear
At once for which they joy, for which they fear.
Hushed on its mother's breast, the cherished child
Unconscious midst the scene of terror smiled;
On rush the matrons, they despairing seek
Miltiades, adored by every Greek;
Him found at length, his counsels they entreat,
Hang on his knees and clasp his sacred feet.
Their babes before him on the ground they throw
In all the maddening listlessness of woe.
First Delopeia, of the matrons chief,
Thus vents her bursting soul in frantic grief,
While her fond babe she holds aloft in air;
Thus her roused breast prefers a mother's prayer:
'Oh Son of Cimon, for the Grecians raise
To heaven, thy fame, thy honor, and thy praise.
Thus — thus — shall Athens and her heroes fall,
Shall thus one ruin seize and bury all?
Say, shall these babes be strangers then to fame,
And be but Greeks in spirit and in name?
Oh first, ye Gods! and hear a mother's prayer,
First let them glorious fall in ranks of war!
If Asia triumph, then shall Hippias reign
And Athens' free-born Sons be slaves again!
Oh Son of Cimon! let thy influence call
The souls of Greeks to triumph or to fall!
And guard their own, their children's, country's name,
From foul dishonor, and eternal shame!'
Thus thro' her griefs, the love of glory broke,
The mother wept, but 't was the Patriot spoke:
And as before the Greek she bowed with grace,
The lucid drops bedewed her lovely face.
Their shrieks and frantic cries the matrons cease,
And death-like silence awes the Sons of Greece.
Thrice did the mighty Chief of Athens seek
To curb his feelings and essay to speak,
'T was vain — the ruthless sorrow wrung his breast,
His mind disheartened, and his soul opprest.
He thus — while o'er his cheek the moisture stole,
'Retire ye matrons, nor unman my soul!
Tho' little strength this aged arm retains,
My swelling soul Athena's foe disdains;
Hushed be your griefs, to heav'n for victory cry,
Assured we'll triumph, or with freedom die.
And ye, oh Chiefs, when night disowns her sway
And pensive Dian yields her power to day,
To quit these towers for Marathon prepare,
And brave Darius in the ranks of war.
For yet may Jove protect the Grecian name
And crown, in unborn ages, Athens' fame.'
He said — and glowing with the warlike fire,
And cheered by hope, the Godlike Chiefs retire.
Now Cynthia rules the earth, the flaming God
In ocean sinks, green Neptune's old abode;
Black Erebus on drowsy pinions springs,
And o'er Athena cowers his sable wings.

BOOK III

When from the deep the hour's eternal sway
Impels the coursers of the flaming day,
The long haired Greeks, with brazen arms prepare,
Their freedom to preserve and wage the war.
First Aristides from the couch arose,
While his great mind with all Minerva glows;
His mighty limbs, his golden arms invest,
The cuirass blazes on his ample breast,
The glittering cuisses both his legs enfold,
And the huge shield 's on fire with burnished gold;
His hands two spears uphold of equal size,
And fame's bright glories kindle in his eyes;
Upon his helmet, plumes of horse hair nod,
And forth he moved, majestic as a God!
Upon his snorting steed the warrior sprung,
The courser neighed, the brazen armor rung;
From heaven's etherial heights the martial maid
With conscious pride, the hero's might surveyed.
Him as she eyed, she shook the gorgon shield;
'Henceforth to me,' she cried, 'let all th' immortals yield.
Let monster Mars, the Latian regions own,
For Attica, Minerva stands alone.'
And now, th' unconquered Chief of Justice gains
The Senate's walls, and there the steed detains,
Whence he dismounts — Miltiades he seeks,
Beloved of Jove, the leader of the Greeks,
Nor sought in vain; there clad in armor bright
The Chieftain stood, all eager for the fight.
Within his aged hands two lances shine,
The helmet blazed upon his brows divine,
And as he bends beneath th' unequal weight
Youth smiles again, when with gigantic might
His nervous limbs, immortal arms could wield,
Crush foe on foe, and raging, heap the field.
Yet tho' such days were past, and ruthless age
Transformed the warrior to the thoughtful sage;
Tho' the remorseless hand of silent time
Impaired each joint, and stiffened every limb;
Yet thro' his breast, the fire celestial stole,
Throbbed in his veins, and kindled in his soul.
In thought, the Lord of Asia threats no more,
And Hippias bites the dust, mid seas of gore.
Him as he viewed, the youthful hero's breast
Heaved high with joy, and thus the Sage addressed:

'Chief, best beloved of Pallas,' he began,
'In fame allied to Gods, oh wondrous man!
Behold Apollo gilds th' Athenian wall,
Our freedom waits, and fame and glory call
To battle! Asia's King and myriads dare,
Swell the loud trump, and swell the din of war.'
He said impatient; then the warrior sage
Began, regardless of the fears of age:
'Not mine, oh youth, with caution to control
The fire and glory of thy eager soul;
So was I wont in brazen arms to shine,
Such strength, and such impatient fire were mine.'
He said, and bade the trumpet's peals rebound,
High, and more high, the echoing war notes sound:
Sudden one general shout the din replies,
A thousand lances blazing as they rise,
And Athens' banners wave, and float along the skies.
So from the marsh, the cranes embodied fly,
Clap their glad wings, and cut the liquid sky.
With thrilling cries they mount their joyful way,
Vig'rous they spring, and hail the new born day.
So rose the shouting Greeks, inspired by fame
T' assert their freedom, and maintain their name.
First came Themistocles in arms renowned,
Whose steed impatient, tore the trembling ground.
High o'er his helmet snowy plumes arise
And shade that brow, which Persia's might defies;
A purple mantle graceful waves behind,
Nor hides his arms but floats upon the wind.
His mighty form two crimson belts enfold
Rich in embroidery, and stiff with gold.
Callimachus the Polemarch next came,
The theme of general praise and general fame.
Cynagirus, who e'en the Gods would dare,
Heap ranks on ranks and thunder thro' the war;
His virtues godlike; man's his strength surpassed,
In battle foremost, and in flight the last:
His ponderous helm 's a shaggy lion's hide.
And the huge war axe clattered at his side,
The mighty Chief, a brazen chariot bore,
While fame and glory hail him and adore.
Antenor next his aid to Athens gave,
Like Paris youthful, and like Hector brave;
Cleon, Minerva's priest, experienced sage,
Advanced in wisdom, as advanced in age.
Agregoras, Delenus' favorite child;
The parent's cares, the glorious son beguiled.
But now he leaves his sire to seek his doom,
His country's freedom, or a noble tomb.
And young Aratus moved with youthful pride,
And heart elated at the hero's side.
Next thou, Cleones, thou triumphant moved
By Athens honored, by the Greeks beloved:
And Sthenelus the echoing pavements trod,
From youth devoted to the martial God.
Honor unspotted crowned the hero's name,
Unbounded virtue, and unbounded fame.
Such heroes shone the foremost of the host,
All Athens' glory, and all Athens' boast.
Behind a sable cloud of warriors rise
With ponderous arms, and shouting rend the skies.
These bands with joy Miltiades inspire,
Fame fills his breast, and sets his soul on fire.
Aloft he springs into the gold-wrought car,
While the shrill blast resounds, to war! to war!
The coursers plunge as conscious of their load
And proudly neighing, feel they bear a God.
The snow white steeds by Pallas' self were given,
Which sprung from the immortal breed of heaven.
The car was wrought of brass and burnished gold,
And divers figures on its bulk were told,
Of heroes who in plunging to the fight
Shrouded Troy's glories in eternal night:
Of fierce Pelides, who relenting gave,
At Priam's prayer, to Hector's corpse a grave;
Here Spartan Helen flies her native shore,
To bid proud Troy majestic stand no more;
There Hector clasps his consort to his breast,
Consoles his sufferings, tho' himself oppressed;
And there he rushes to the embattled field
For victory or death, nor e'en in death to yield:
Here Ilium prostrate feels the Argive ire,
Her heroes perished, and her towers on fire.
And here old Priam breathes his last drawn sigh,
And feels 't is least of all his griefs to die.
There his loved sire, divine Æneas bears,
And leaves his own with all a patriot's tears,
While in one hand he holds his weeping boy,
And looks his last on lost unhappy Troy.
The warrior seized the reins, the impatient steeds
Foam at the mouth and spring where glory leads.
The gates, the heroes pass, th' Athenian dames
Bend from their towers, and bid them save from flames
Their walls, their infant heirs, and fill the skies
With shouts, entreaties, prayers, and plaintive cries:
Echo repeats their words, the sounds impart
New vigor to each Greek's aspiring heart.
Forward with shouts they press, and hastening on
Try the bold lance and dream of Marathon.
Meanwhile the Persians on th' embattled plain
Prepare for combat, and the Greeks disdain.
Twice twenty sable bulls they daily pay,
Unequalled homage, to the God of day;
Such worthy gifts, the wealthy warriors bring,
And such the offerings of the Persian King;
While the red wine around his altars flowed
They beg protection from the flaming God.
But the bright Patron of the Trojan war
Accepts their offerings, but rejects their prayer:
The power of love alone dares rigid fate,
To vent on Greece her vengeance and her hate;
Not love for Persia prompts the vengeful dame,
But hate for Athens, and the Grecian name:

In Phœbus' name, the fraudful Queen receives
The hecatombs, and happy omens gives.
And now the heralds with one voice repeat
The will of Datis echoing thro' the fleet,
To council, to convene the Persian train,
That Athens' Chiefs should brave their might in vain.
The Chiefs and Hippias' self his will obey,
And seek the camp, the heralds lead the way.
There on the couch, their leader Datis sat
In ease luxurious, and in kingly state;
Around his brow, pride deep and scornful played,
A purple robe, his slothful limbs arrayed,
Which o'er his form, its silken draperies fold,
Majestic sweeps the ground, and glows with gold;
While Artaphernes resting at his side
Surveys th' advancing train with conscious pride.
The Elder leader, mighty Datis, then,
'Assembled Princes, great and valiant men,
And thou thrice glorious Hippias, loved by heav'n,
To whom, as to thy Sire, is Athens giv'n;
Behold the Grecian banners float afar,
Shouting they hail us, and provoke the war.
Then, mighty Chiefs and Princes, be it yours
To warm and fire the bosoms of our powers,
That when the morn has spread her saffron light,
The Greeks may own and dread Darius' might;
For know, oh Chiefs, when once proud Athens falls,
When Persian flames shall reach her haughty walls,
From her depression, wealth to you shall spring,
And honor, fame, and glory to your King.'
He said; his words the Princes' breasts inspire,
Silent they bend, and with respect retire.
And now the Greeks in able marches gain,
By Pallas fired, the Marathonian plain.
Before their eyes th' unbounded ocean rolls
And all Darius' fleet — unawed their souls,
They fix their banners, and the tents they raise
And in the sun, their polished javelins blaze.
Their leader's self within the brazen car
Their motions orders, and prepares for war;
Their labors o'er, the aged hero calls
The Chiefs to council midst the canvas walls,
And then the Sage, 'How great the Persian host!
But let them not their strength or numbers boast.
Their slothful minds to love of fame unknown,
Sigh not for war, but for the spoil alone.
Strangers to honor's pure immortal light,
They not as heroes, but as women fight;
Grovelling as proud, and cowardly as vain,
The Greeks they fear, their numbers they disdain.
And now Athenians! fired by glory, rise
And lift your fame unsullied to the skies,
Your victim Persia, liberty your prize.
And now twice twenty sable bullocks bring
To heap the altars of the thundering King,
Bid twelve white heifers of gigantic breed
To Jove's great daughter, wise Minerva, bleed,
And then in sleep employ the solemn night
Nor till Apollo reigns, provoke the fight.'
The hero said; the warlike council o'er
They raise the lofty altars on the shore.
They pile in heaps the pride of all the wood;
They fall the first, who first in beauty stood:
The pine that soars to heaven, the sturdy oak,
And cedars crackle at each hero's stroke.
And now two altars stand of equal size
And lift their forms majestic to the skies,
The heroes then twice twenty bullocks bring,
A worthy offering to the thundering King.
The aged leader seized the sacred knife,
Blow followed blow, out gushed the quivering life;
Thro' their black hides the ruthless steel is driven
The victims groan — Jove thunders from his heaven.
And then their bulks upon the pile they lay,
The flames rush upward, and the armies pray.
Driven by the wind, the roaring fires ascend,
And now they hiss in air, and now descend;
With all their sap, the new cut faggots raise
Their flames to heaven, and crackle as they blaze;
And then the Sage, 'Oh, thou of powers above
The first and mightiest, hear, eternal Jove!
Give us, that Athens in her strength may rise
And lift our fame and freedom to the skies!'
This said, he ceased — th' assembled warriors pour
The sacred incense, and the God adore;
Then partial Jove propitious heard their prayer,
Thrice shook the heavens, and thundered thro' the air;
With joy, the Greeks, the favoring sign inspires,
And their breasts glow with all the warlike fires:
And now twelve heifers white as snow they lead
To great Minerva's sacred name to bleed.
They fall — their bulks upon the pile are laid
Sprinkled with oil, and quick in flame arrayed.
And now descending midst the darkening skies
Behold the Goddess of the radiant eyes.
The ground she touched, beneath the mighty load
Earth groaning rocks, and nature hails the God.
Within her hand her father's lightnings shone,
And shield that blazes near th' eternal throne;
The Greeks with fear, her dauntless form surveyed,
And trembling bowed before the blue-eyed maid.
Then favoring, thus began the power divine,
While in her eyes celestial glories shine;
'Ye sons of Athens, loved by heaven,' she cries
'Revered by men, be valiant and be wise.
When morn awakes, Darius' numbers dare,

Clang your loud arms, and rouse the swelling war:
But first to yon proud fleet a herald send
To bid the Persians yield, and fight suspend,
For vainly to their God they suppliant call,
Jove favors Greece, and Pallas wills their fall.'
She said, and thro' the depths of air she flies,
Mounts the blue heaven, and scales the liquid skies.
The Greeks rejoicing thank the powers above
And Jove's great daughter, and eternal Jove.
And now a herald to the fleet they send
To bid the Persians yield, and war suspend.
Thro' the divided troops the herald goes
Thro' Athens' host, and thro' th' unnumbered foes.
Before the holy man, the Persian bands
Reverend give way, and ask what Greece demands:
He tells not all, but that he, chosen, seeks
Datis their Chief, by order of the Greeks.
The mission but in part he sage reveals,
And what his prudence prompts him, he conceals.
Then to their Chief they lead him, where he sat
With pomp surrounded, and in gorgeous state;
Around his kingly couch, his arms were spread
Flaming in gold, by forge Cyclopean made;
And then stern Datis frowning thus began,
'What hopes deceive thee, miserable man?
What treacherous fate allures thee thus to stray
Thro' all our hosts? What Gods beguile the way?
Think'st thou to 'scape the Persian steel, when Greece
Our herald crushed, and banished hopes of peace?
But speak, what will the Greeks? and do they dare
To prove our might, and tempt th' unequal war?
Or do they deign to own Darius' sway
And yield to Persia's might th' embattled day?'
To whom th' Athenian herald made reply
'The Greeks disdain your terms, and scorn to fly.
Unknown to heroes and to sons of Greece
The shameful slavery of a Persian peace;
Defiance stern, not servile gifts I bring,
Your bonds detested, and despised your King;
Of equal size, the Greeks two altars raise
To Jove's high glory, and Minerva's praise.
The God propitious heard, and from the skies
Descends the Goddess of the azure eyes,
And thus began — "Assembled Greeks, give ear
Attend my wisdom, nor my glory fear;
When morn awakes, Darius' numbers dare,
Clang your loud arms, and rouse the swelling war:
But first to yon proud fleet a herald send
To bid the Persians yield, and war suspend,
For vainly to their God they suppliant call,
Jove favors Greece, and Pallas wills their fall.'
The Goddess spoke; th' Athenians own her sway.
I seek the fleet, and heaven's command obey.
The Greeks disdain your millions in the war,
Nor I, oh Chief, your promised vengeance fear.
Strike! but remember that the God on high
Who rules the heavens, and thunders thro' the sky,
Not unrevenged will see his herald slain,
Nor shall thy threats his anger tempt in vain.'
And thus the Greek: then Datis thus replies,
Flames black and fearful scowling from his eyes,
'Herald away! and Asia's vengeance fear;
Back to your phrenzied train my mandate bear,
That Greece and Grecian Gods may threat in vain,
We scorn their anger, and their wrath disdain:
For he who lights the earth and rules the skies
With happy omens to our vows replies.
When morn uprising breathes her saffron light,
Prepare to dare our millions in the fight.
Thy life I give, Darius' will to say
And Asia's hate — hence, Chief, no more, away!'
He said, and anger filled the Grecian's breast,
But prudent, he the rising wrath suppressed;
Indignant, thro' the canvas tents he strode
And silently invoked the thundering God.
Fears for his country in his bosom rose,
As on he wandered midst unnumbered foes;
He strikes his swelling breast and hastens on
O'er the wide plains of barren Marathon.
And now he sees the Grecian banners rise,
And well-armed warriors blaze before his eyes.
Then thus he spoke — 'Ye Grecian bands, give ear,
Ye warrior Chiefs and Attic heroes hear!
Your will to Asia's other Prince I told,
All which you bade me, Chieftains, to unfold,
But Pallas' vengeance I denounced in vain,
Your threats he scorned, and heard with proud disdain.
The God, he boasts, who lights the earth and skies,
With happy omens to his vows replies;
Then when the uprising morn extends her light
Prepare, ye Greeks, to dare his powers in fight.'
He said — the Greeks for instant strife declare
Their will, and arm impatient for the war.
Then he, their godlike Chief, as Pallas sage,
'Obey my counsels, and repress your rage,
Ye Greeks,' he cried, 'the sacred night displays
Her shadowy veil, and earth in gloom arrays;
Her sable shades, e'en Persia's Chiefs obey,
And wait the golden mandate of the day:
Such is the will of Jove, and Gods above,
And such the order of the loved of Jove.'
He said — the Greeks their leader's word obey

They seek their tents, and wait th' approaching day,
O'er either host celestial Somnus reigns,
And solemn silence lulls th' embattled plains.

BOOK IV

And now the morn by Jove to mortals given
With rosy fingers opes the gates of heaven.
The Persian Princes and their haughty Lord
Gird on their arms, and seize the flaming sword:
Forth, forth they rush to tempt the battle's roar,
Earth groans, and shouts rebellowing shake the shore.
As when the storm the heavenly azure shrouds
With sable night, and heaps on clouds, the clouds,
The Persians rose, and crowd th' embattl'd plain
And stretch their warlike millions to the main;
And now th' Athenians throng the fatal field
By fame inspired, and swords and bucklers wield;
In air sublime their floating banners rise,
The lances blaze; the trumpets rend the skies.
And then Miltiades — 'Athenians, hear,
Behold the Persians on the field appear
Dreadful in arms; remember, Greeks, your fame,
Rush to the war, and vindicate your name;
Forward! till low in death the Persians lie,
For freedom triumph or for freedom die.'
He said; his visage glows with heavenly light;
He spoke sublime, and rush'd into the fight.
And now the fury of the way[1] began —
Lance combats lance, and man 's opposed to man;
Beneath their footsteps, groans the laboring plain
And shouts re-echoing bellow to the main;
Mars rages fierce; by heroes, heroes die;
Earth rocks, Jove thunders, and the wounded cry.
What mighty Chiefs by Aristides fell,
What heroes perished, heavenly Goddess, tell,
First thou, oh Peleus! felt his conquering hand,
Stretched in the dust and weltering in the sand,
Thro' thy bright shield, the forceful weapon went,
Thyself in arms o'erthrown, thy corslet rent;
Next rash Antennes met an early fate,
And feared, alas! th' unequal foe too late;
And Delucus the sage, and Philo fell,
And Crotan sought the dreary gates of hell,
And Mnemon's self with wealth and honor crowned,
Revered for virtue, and for fame renowned;
He, great in battle, feared the hero's hand,
Groaning he fell, and spurned the reeking sand.
But what bold chief thus rashly dares advance?
Tho' not in youth, he shakes the dreadful lance,
Proudly the earth the haughty warrior trod,
He looked a Monarch and he moved a God:
Then on the Greek with rage intrepid flew
And with one blow th' unwary Greek o'erthrew;
That hour, oh Chief, and that eventful day
Had bade thee pass a shivering ghost away,
But Pallas, fearful for her fav'rite's life,
Sudden upraised thee to renew the strife;
Then Aristides with fresh vigor rose,
Shame fired his breast, his soul with anger glows,
With all his force he rushes on the foe,
The warrior bending disappoints the blow,
And thus with rage contemptuous, 'Chieftain, know,
Hippias, the loved of heaven, thine eyes behold,
Renowned for strength of arm, in battle bold,
But tell thy race, and who the man whose might
Dares cope with rebel Athens' King in fight.'
Stung to the soul, 'Oh Slave,' the Greek returns,
While his big heart within his bosom burns,
'Perfidious Prince, to faith and truth unknown;
On Athens' ashes, raise thy tyrant throne,
When Grecia's chiefs, and Grecia's heroes fall,
When Persia's fires invest her lofty wall,
When nought but slaves within her towers remain,
Then, nor till then, shalt thou, oh Hippias, reign,
Then, nor till then, will Athens yield her fame
To foul dishonor, and eternal shame;
Come on! no matter what my race or name;
For this, oh Prince, this truth unerring know,
That in a Greek, you meet a noble foe.'
Furious he said, and on the Prince he sprung
With all his force, the meeting armor rung,
Struggling they raged, and both together fell.
That hour the tyrant's ghost had entered hell,
But partial fate prolonged the Prince's breath,
Renewed the combat, and forbad the death.
Meanwhile the hosts, the present war suspend,
Silent they stand, and heaven's decree attend.
First the bright lance majestic Hippias threw
But erringly the missile weapon flew;
Then Aristides hurled the thirsty dart,
Struck the round shield, and nearly pierced his heart,
But the bright arms, that shone with conscious pride,
Received the blow, and turned the point aside.
And thus, the Greek, 'Whom your enquiring eyes
Behold, oh Prince,' th' Athenian hero cries,
'Is Aristides, called the just, a name
By Athens honored, nor unknown to fame.'
Scared at the sound, and seized by sudden fright,

---

[1] [So the original; query, *day* or *fray*?]

The Prince starts back, in mean, inglorious flight.
And now Bellona rages o'er the field,
All strive elated, all disdain to yield;
And great Themistocles in arms renowned,
Stretched heaps of heroes on the groaning ground.
First by his hand fell Delos' self, divine,
The last loved offspring of a noble line,
Straight thro' his neck the reeking dart was driven,
Prostrate he sinks, and vainly calls to heaven.
Next godlike Phanes, midst the Persians just,
Leucon and mighty Caudos bit the dust;
And now the Greek, with pride imprudent, dares
Victorious Mandrocles renowned in wars.
The agile Persian swift avoids the blow
Furious disarms and grasps th' unequal foe!
Th' intrepid Greek, with godlike calm awaits
His instant fall, and dares th' impending fates,
But great Cynœgirus his danger spies
And lashed his steeds, the ponderous chariot flies,
Then from its brazen bulk, he leaps to ground,
Beneath his clanging arms the plains resound,
And on the Persian rushes fierce, and raised
The clattering axe on high, which threatening blazed,
And lopped his head; out spouts the smoking gore
And the huge trunk rolled bleeding on the shore.
And then Cynœgirus, 'Thus, Persian, go
And boast thy victory in the shades below,
A headless form, and tell who bade thee bleed,
For know a Greek performed the wonderous deed:
But thou, Themistocles, oh hero! say
Who bade thee rush, to tempt th' unequal fray?
But learn from this, thy daring to restrain,
And seek less mighty foes upon the plain.'
With secret wrath the youthful hero burned
And thus impetuous to the Chief returned;
'Such thoughts as these, unworthy those who dare
The battle's rage, and tempt the toils of war;
Heedless of death, and by no fears opprest,
Conquest my aim, I leave to heaven the rest.'
He said, and glowed with an immortal light,
Plunged 'midst the foes, and mingled in the fight.
Zeno the bravest of the Persian youth
Renowned for filial piety and truth;
His mother's only joy; she loved to trace
His father's features in his youthful face;
That Sire, in fight o'erwhelmed, mid seas of gore
Slept unentombed, and cared for fame no more.
And now as youth in opening manhood glows,
All his loved father in his visage rose,
Like him, regardful of his future fame,
Resolved like him to immortalize his name.
At glory's call, he quits his native shore
And feeble parent, to return no more;
Oh! what prophetic griefs her bosom wrung
When on his neck in agony she hung!
When on that breast she hid her sorrowing face,
And feared to take, or shun, the last embrace!
Unhappy youth! the fates decree thy doom,
Those flowers, prepared for joy, shall deck thy tomb.
Thy mother now no more shall hail thy name
So high enrolled upon the lists of fame,
Nor check the widow's tear, the widow's sigh,
For e'en her son, her Zeno's doom to die.
Zeno, e'en thou! for so the Gods decree,
A parents' threshold opes no more for thee!
On him the hero turned his eye severe
Nor on his visage saw one mark of fear;
There manly grace improved each separate part,
And joined by ties of truth, the face and heart.
The supple javelin then the Grecian tries
With might gigantic, and the youth defies.
Its point impetuous, at his breast he flung,
The brazen shield received, and mocking rung;
Then Zeno seized the lance, the Chief defied,
And scoffing, thus began, in youthful pride;
'Go, mighty Greek! to weaker warriors go,
And fear this arm, and an unequal foe;
A mother gave the mighty arms I bear,
Nor think with such a gift, I cherish fear.'
He hurled the lance, but Pallas' self was there,
And turned the point, it passed in empty air.
With hope renewed, again the hero tries
His boasted might, the thirsty weapon flies
In Zeno's breast it sinks, and drank the gore,
And stretched the hero vanquished on the shore;
Gasping for utterance, and life, and breath,
For fame he sighs, nor fears approaching death.
Themistocles perceived, and bending low
Thought of his friends, and tears began to flow
That washed the bleeding bosom of his foe.
Young Zeno then, the Grecian hero eyed
Rejects his offered aid, and all defied,
Breathed one disdainful sigh, and turned his head and died.
Such Persians did the godlike warrior slay,
And bade their groaning spirits pass away.
Epizelus, the valiant and the strong,
Thundered in fight, and carried death along;
Him not a Greek in strength of arms surpassed,
In battle foremost, but in virtue last.
He, impious man, to combat dared defy
The Gods themselves, and senate of the sky,
E'en earth and heaven, and heaven's eternal sire,
He mocks his thunders, and disdains his ire.
But now the retributive hour is come,
And rigid justice seals the Boaster's doom.
Theseus he sees, within the fight, revealed
To him alone — to all the rest concealed

To punish guilt, he leaves the shades below
And quits the seat of never ending woe.
Pale as in death, upon his hands he bore
Th' infernal serpent of the dreadful shore,
To stay his progress should he strive to fly
From Tart'rus far, and gain the upper sky.
This (dreadful sight!) with slippery sinews now
Wreathed round his form, and clasped his ghastly brow;
With horror struck, and seized with sudden awe
The Greek beheld, nor mingled in the war.
Withheld from combat by the force of fear,
He trembling thus — 'Oh say, what God draws near?
But speak thy will, if 't is a God, oh speak!
Nor vent thy vengeance on a single Greek.'
Vainly he suppliant said — o'erpowered with fright,
And instant from his eyeballs fled the sight;
Confused, distracted, to the skies he throws
His frantic arms, and thus bewails his woes:
'Almighty! thou by whom the bolts are driven!'
He said, and cast his sightless balls to heav'n,
'Restore my sight, unhappy me, restore
My own loved offspring, to behold once more!
So will I honor thy divine abodes,
And learn how dreadful th' avenging Gods!
And if — but oh forbid! you mock my prayer
And cruel fate me ever cursed declare,
Give me, to yield to fame alone my life
And fall immortalized, — in glorious strife!'
He said — the God who thunders thro' the air,
Frowns on his sufferings and rejects his prayer.
Around his form the dreadful Ægis spread
And darts fall harmless on his wretched head;
Condemned by fate in ceaseless pain to groan,
Friendless, in grief, in agony alone.
Now Mars and death pervade on every side
And heroes fall, and swell the crimson tide.
Not with less force th' Athenian leader shone
In strife conspicuous, nor to fame unknown,
Advanced in wisdom, and in honored years,
He nor for life, but for the battle fears.
Borne swift as winds within the flying car
Now here, now there, directs the swelling war,
On every side the foaming coursers guides,
Here praises valor, and there rashness chides;
While from his lips persuasive accents flow
T' inspire th' Athenians, or unman the foe.
The glorious Greeks rush on, with daring might
And shout and thunder, and encrease the fight.
Nor yet inglorious do the Persians shine,
In battle's ranks they strength and valor join.
Datis himself impels the ponderous car
Thro' broken ranks, conspicuous in the war,
In armor sheathed, and terror round him spread
He whirls his chariot over heaps of dead;
Where'er he dreadful rushes, warriors fly,
Ghosts seek their hell, and chiefs and heroes die.
All pale with rage he ranks on ranks o'erthrows,
For blood he gasps, and thunders midst his foes.
Callimachus the mighty leader found
In fight conspicuous, bearing death around.
The lance wheeled instant from the Persian's hand
Transfixed the glorious Grecian in the sand.
Fate ends the hero's life, and stays his breath
And clouds his eyeballs with the shade of death:
Erect in air the cruel javelin stood,
Pierced thro' his breast, and drank the spouting blood.
Released from life's impending woes and care,
The soul immerges in the fields of air:
Then, crowned with laurels, seeks the blest abodes
Of awful Pluto, and the Stygian floods.
And now with joy great Aristides saw
Again proud Hippias thundering thro' the war,
And mocking thus, 'Oh tyrant, now await
The destined blow, behold thy promised fate!
Thrice mighty King, obey my javelin's call
For e'en thy godlike self 's decreed to fall;'
He said, and hurled the glittering spear on high,
The destined weapon hissed along the sky;
Winged by the hero's all-destroying hand
It pierced the Prince, and stretched him on the sand.
Then thro' the air the awful peals were driven
And lightnings blazed along the vast of heaven.
The Persian hosts behold their bulwark die,
Fear chills their hearts, and all their numbers fly,
And reached the fleet; the shouting Greeks pursue
All Asia's millions, flying in their view.
On, on, they glorious rush, and side by side
Yet red with gore, they plunge into the tide;
For injured freedom's sake, th' indignant main
With swelling pride receives the crimson stain;
The Persians spread the sail, nor dare delay,
And suppliant call upon the King of day,
But vainly to their Gods the cowards pray.
Some of the ships th' Athenian warriors stay
And fire their bulks; the flames destroying rise,
Rushing they swell, and mount into the skies.
Foremost Cynægirus with might divine,
While midst the waves his arms majestic shine;
With blood-stained hand a Persian ship he seized,
The vessel vainly strove to be released;
With fear the crew the godlike man beheld,
And pride and shame their troubled bosoms swelled.
They lop his limb: then Pallas fires his frame
With scorn of death, and hope of future fame:
Then with the hand remaining seized the prize,

A glorious spirit kindling in his eyes.
Again the Persians wield the unmanly blow
And wreck their vengeance on a single foe.
The fainting Greek by loss of blood opprest
Still feels the patriot rise within his breast. 1450
Within his teeth the shattered ship he held,
Nor in his soul one wish for life rebelled.
But strength decaying, fate suppress his breath,
And o'er his brows expand the dews of death.
The Elysium plains his generous spirit trod,
'He lived a Hero and he died a God.'
By vengeance fired, the Grecians from the deep
With rage and shouting, scale the lofty ship,
Then in the briny bosom of the main
They hurl in heaps the living and the slain.
Thro' the wide shores resound triumphant cries, 1461
Fill all the seas, and thunder thro' the skies.

II

AN ESSAY ON MIND

> 'My narrow leaves cannot in them contayne
> The large discourse.' — *Spenser.*

In 1826, when Elizabeth Barrett was twenty, her first volume of verse was offered to the public under the title of *An Essay on Mind, with Other Poems.* (LONDON. James Duncan.) Nineteen years later she said of it, in deprecation, to Robert Browning, whose growing interest in the poetess disposed him to regard with reverential interest everything that bore her signature, that it was only a 'girlish exercise,' and, 'after all, more printed than published.' This probably means that her father, Mr. Moulton-Barrett, bore more than half the cost of production. In the notes for her biography which Mrs. Browning furnished to Mr. Horne in 1853, she mentions the 'Essay on Mind' as 'long repented of, and worthy of all repentance;' 'and yet,' she adds, 'it is not without traces of an individual thinking and feeling. The bird pecks through the shell in it.' The 'Other Poems' consisted of fourteen miscellaneous pieces, mostly occasional verses or personal tributes, — 'On the Death of Lord Byron,' 'To My Father on his Birthday,' etc., of small intrinsic merit, and no permanent significance.

ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST BOOK

THE poem commences by remarking the desire, natural to the mind, of investigating its own qualities — qualities the more exalted, as their development has seldom been impeded by external circumstances — The various dispositions of different minds are next considered, and are compared to the varieties of scenic nature; inequalities in the spiritual not being more wonderful than inequalities in the natural — Byron and Campbell contrasted — The varieties of genius having been thus treated, the art of criticism is briefly alluded to, as generally independent of genius, but always useful to its productions — Jeffrey — The various stages of life in which genius appears, and the different causes by which its influence is discovered — Cowley, Alfieri — Allusion to the story of the emotion of Thucydides on hearing Herodotus recite his History at the Olympic Games — The elements of Mind are thus arranged, Invention, Judgment, Memory, and Association — The creations of mind are next noticed, among which we first behold Philosophy — History, Science, and Metaphysics are included in the studies of Philosophy.

Of History, it is observed, that though on a cursory view her task of recalling the past may appear of little avail, it is in reality one of the highest importance — The living are sent for a lesson to the grave — The present state of Rome alluded to; and the future state of England anticipated — Condemnation of those who deprive historical facts of their moral inference, and only make use of their basis to render falsehood more secure — Gibbon — Condemnation of those who would color the political conduct of past ages with their own political feelings — Hume, Mitford — From the writers, we turn to the readers of history — Their extreme scepticism, or credulity — They are recommended to be guided by no faction; but to measure facts by their consistency with reason — to study the personal character and circumstances of an historian, before they give entire credit to his representations — The influence of private feeling and prejudice — Miller — Science is introduced — Apostrophe to man — Episode of Archimedes — Parallel between history and science — The pride of the latter considered most excessive — The risk attending knowledge — Buffon, Leibnitz — The advantageous experience to be derived from the errors of others, illustrated by an allusion to Southey's Hexameters — Utility the object of science — An exclusive attention to parts deprecated, since it is impossible even to have a just idea of PARTS, without acquiring a knowledge of their relative situation in the whole — The extreme difficulty of enlarging the contemplations of a mind long accustomed to contracted views — The scale of knowledge — every science being linked with the one preceding and succeeding — giving and receiving reciprocal support — Why this system is not calculated, as might be conjectured, either to render scientific men superficial, or to intrude on the operations of genius — That the danger of knowledge originates in PARTIAL knowledge — Apostrophe to Newton.

BOOK I

SINCE Spirit first inspir'd, pervaded all,
And Mind met Matter, at th' Eternal call —
Since dust weigh'd Genius down, or Genius gave
Th' immortal halo to the mortal's grave;

Th' ambitious soul her essence hath defin'd,
And Mind hath eulogiz'd the pow'rs of Mind.
Ere Revelation's holy light began
To strengthen Nature, and illumine Man —
When Genius, on Icarian pinions, flew,
And Nature's pencil, Nature's portrait, drew;
When Reason shudder'd at her own wan beam,
And Hope turn'd pale beneath the sickly gleam —
Ev'n then hath Mind's triumphant influence spoke,
Dust own'd the spell, and Plato's spirit woke —
Spread her eternal wings, and rose sublime
Beyond th' expanse of circumstance and time:
Blinded, but free, with faith instinctive, soar'd,
And found her home, where prostrate saints ador'd!

Thou thing of light! that warm'st the breasts of men,
Breath'st from the lips, and tremblest from the pen!
Thou, form'd at once t' astonish, fire, beguile, —
With Bacon reason, and with Shakespeare smile!
The subtle cause, ethereal essence! say,
Why dust rules dust, and clay surpasses clay;
Why a like mass of atoms should combine
To form a Tully, and a Catiline?
Or why, with flesh perchance of equal weight,
One cheers a prize-fight, and one frees a state?
Why do not I the muse of Homer call,
Or why, indeed, did Homer sing at all?
Why wrote not Blackstone upon love's delusion,
Or Moore, a libel on the Constitution?
Why must the faithful page refuse to tell
That Dante, Laura sang, and Petrarch, Hell —
That Tom Paine argued in the throne's defence —
That Byron nonsense wrote, and Thurlow sense —
That Southey sigh'd with all a patriot's cares,
While Locke gave utterance to Hexameters?
Thou thing of light! instruct my pen to find
Th' unequal pow'rs, the various forms of Mind!

O'er Nature's changeful face direct your sight;
View light meet shade, and shade dissolve in light!
Mark, from the plain, the cloud-capp'd mountain soar;
The sullen ocean spurn the desert shore!
Behold, afar, the playmate of the storm,
Wild Niagara lifts his awful form —
Spits his black foam above the madd'ning floods,
Himself the savage of his native woods —
See him, in air, his smoking torrents wheel,
While the rocks totter, and the forests reel —
Then, giddy, turn! lo! Shakespeare's Avon flows,
Charm'd, by the green-sward's kiss, to soft repose;
With tranquil brow reflects the smile of fame,
And, 'midst her sedges, sighs her Poet's name.
Thus, in bright sunshine, and alternate storms,
Is various mind express'd in various forms.
In equal men, why burns not equal fire?
Why are not valleys hills, — or mountains higher?
Her destin'd way, hath destin'd Nature trod;
While Matter, Spirit rules, and Spirit, God.

Let outward scenes, for inward sense design'd,
Call back our wand'rings to the world of Mind!
Where Reason, o'er her vasty realms, may stand,
Convene proud thoughts, and stretch her scepter'd hand.
Here, classic recollections breathe around;
Here, living Glory consecrates the ground;
And here, Mortality's deep waters span
The shores of Genius, and the paths of Man!

O'er this imagin'd land, your soul direct —
Mark Byron, the Mont Blanc of intellect,
'Twixt earth and heav'n exalt his brow sublime,
O'erlook the nations, and shake hands with Time!
Stretch'd at his feet do Nature's beauties throng,
The flow'rs of love, the gentleness of song;
Above, the Avalanche's thunder speaks,
While Terror's spirit walks abroad, and shrieks!

To some Utopian strand, some fairy shore,
Shall soft-eyed Fancy waft her Campbell o'er!
Wont, o'er the lyre of Hope, his hand to fling,
And never waken a discordant string;
Who ne'er grows awkward by affecting grace,
Or 'Common sense confounds with commonplace;'
To bright conception, adds expression chaste,
And human feeling joins to classic taste.
For still, with magic art, he knows, and knew,
To touch the heart, and win the judgment too!

Thus, in uncertain radiance, Genius glows,
And fitful gleams on various mind bestows:
While Mind, exulting in th' admitted day,
On various themes, reflects its kindling ray.
Unequal forms receive an equal light;
And Klopstock wrote what Kepler could not write.

Yet Fame hath welcom'd a less noble few,
And Glory hail'd whom Genius never knew;
Art labor'd, Nature's birthright, to secure,
And forg'd, with cunning hand, her signature.
The scale of life is link'd by close degrees;
Motes float in sunbeams, mites exist in cheese;
Critics seize half the fame which bards receive, —
And Shakespeare suffers that his friends may live;
While Bentley leaves, on stilts, the beaten track,

And peeps at glory from some ancient's back.
But, though to hold a lantern to the sun
Be not too wise, and were as well undone —
Though, e'en in this inventive age, alas!
A moral darkness can't be cur'd by gas —
And, though we may not reasonably deem
How poets' craniums can be turn'd by steam —
Yet own we, in our juster reasonings,
That lanterns, gas, and steam, are useful things —
And oft, this truth, Reflection ponders o'er —
Bards would write worse, if critics wrote no more.

Let Jeffrey's praise, our willing pen, engage,
The letter'd critic of a letter'd age!
Who justly judges, rightfully discerns,
With wisdom teaches, and with candor learns.
His name on Scotia's brightest tablet lives,
And proudly claims the laurel that it gives.

Eternal Genius! fashion'd like the sun,
To make all beautiful thou look'st upon!
Prometheus of our earth! whose kindling smile
May warm the things of clay a little while;
Till, by thy touch inspir'd, thine eyes survey'd,
Thou stoop'st to love the glory thou hast made;
And weepest, human-like, the mortal's fall,
When, by-and-bye, a breath disperses all.
Eternal Genius! mystic essence! say,
How, on 'the chosen breast,' descends thy day!
Breaks it at once in Thought's celestial dream,
While Nature trembles at the sudden gleam?
Or steals it, gently, like the morning's light,
Shedding, unmark'd, an influence soft and bright,
Till all the landscape gather on the sight?

As different talents, different breasts, inspire,
So different causes wake the latent fire.
The gentle Cowley of our native clime,
Lisp'd his first accents in Aonian rhyme.
Alfieri's startling muse tun'd not her strings,
And dumbly look'd 'unutterable things;'
Till, when six lustrums o'er his head had past,
Conception found expression's voice at last;
Broke the bright light, uprose the smother'd flame, —
And Mind and Nature own'd their poet's fame!
To some the waving woods, the harp of spring,
A gently-breathing inspiration bring!
Some hear, from Nature's haunts, her whisper'd call;
And Mind hath triumph'd by an apple's fall.

Wave Fancy's picturing wand! recall the scene
Which Mind hath hallow'd — where her sons have been —
Where, 'midst Olympia's concourse, simply great,
Th' historic sage, the son of Lyxes, sate,
Grasping th' immortal scroll — he breath'd no sound,
But, calm in strength, an instant look'd around,
And rose — the tone of expectation rush'd
Through th' eager throng — he spake, and Greece was hush'd!
See, in that breathless crowd, Olorus stand,
While one fair boy hangs, list'ning, on his hand —
The young Thucydides! with upward brow
Of radiance, and dark eye, that beaming now
Full on the speaker, drinks th' inspirëd air —
Gazing entranc'd, and turn'd to marble there!
Yet not to marble — for the wild emotion
Is kindling on his cheek, like light on ocean,
Coming to vanish; and his pulses throb
With transport, and the inarticulate sob
Swells to his lip — internal nature leaps
To glorious life, and all th' historian weeps!
The mighty master mark'd the favor'd child —
Did Genius linger there? She did, and smil'd!
Still, on itself, let Mind its eye direct,
To view the elements of intellect —
How wild Invention (daring artist!) plies
Her magic pencil, and creating dies;
And Judgment, near the living canvass, stands,
To blend the colors for her airy hands;
While Memory waits, with twilight mists o'ercast,
To mete the length'ning shadows of the past:
And bold Association, not untaught,
The links of fact, unites, with links of thought;
Forming th' electric chains, which, mystic, bind
Scholastic learning, and reflective mind.

Let reasoning Truth's unerring glance survey
The fair creations of the mental ray;
Her holy lips, with just discernment, teach
The forms, the attributes, the modes of each,
And tell, in simple words, the narrow span
That circles intellect, and fetters man;
Where darkling mists, o'er Time's last footstep, creep,
And Genius drops her languid wing — to weep.

See first Philosophy's mild spirit, nigh,
Raise the rapt brow, and lift the thoughtful eye;
Whether the glimmering lamp, that Hist'ry gave,
Light her enduring steps to some lone grave;
The while she dreams on him, asleep beneath,
And conjures mystic thoughts of life and death —
Whether, on Science' rushing wings, she sweep
From concave heav'n to earth — and search the deep;
Shewing the pensile globe attraction's force,
The tides their mistress, and the stars their course:
Or whether (task with nobler object fraught)
She turn the pow'rs of thinking back on thought —
With mind, delineate mind; and dare define
The point, where human mingles with divine:
Majestic still, her solemn form shall stand,
To shew the beacon on the distant land —
Of thought, and nature, chronicler sublime!
The world her lesson, and her teacher Time!

And when, with half a smile, and half a sigh,
She lifts old History's faded tapestry,
I' the dwelling of past years — she, aye, is seen
Point to the shades, where bright'ning tints had been —
The shapeless forms outworn, and mildew'd o'er —
And bids us rev'rence what was lov'd before ;
Gives the dank wreath and dusty urn to fame,
And lends its ashes — all she can — a name.
Think'st thou, in vain, while pale Time glides away,
She rakes cold graves, and chronicles their clay ?
Think'st thou, in vain, she counts the boney things,
Once lov'd as patriots, or obey'd as kings ?
Lifts she, in vain, the past's mysterious veil ?
Seest thou no moral in her awful tale ?
Can man, the crumbling pile of nations, scan, —
And is their mystic language mute for man ?

Go ! let the tomb its silent lesson give,
And let the dead instruct thee how to live !
If Tully's page hath bade thy spirit burn,
And lit the raptur'd cheek — behold his urn !
If Maro's strains, thy soaring fancy, guide,
That hail ' th' eternal city ' in their pride —
Then turn to mark, in some reflective hour,
The immortality of mortal pow'r !
See the crush'd column, and the ruin'd dome —
'T is all Eternity has left of Rome !
While travell'd crowds, with curious gaze, repair,
To read the littleness of greatness there !

Alas ! alas ! so, Albion shall decay,
And all my country's glory pass away !
So shall she perish, as the mighty must,
And be Italia's rival — in the dust ;
While her ennobled sons, her cities fair,
Be dimly thought of 'midst the things that were !
Alas ! alas ! her fields of pleasant green,
Her woods of beauty, and each well-known scene !
Soon, o'er her plains, shall grisly Ruin haste,
And the gay vale become the silent waste !
Ah ! soon perchance, our native tongue forgot —
The land may hear strange words it knoweth not ;
And the dear accents which our bosoms move,
With sounds of friendship, or with tones of love,
May pass away ; or, conn'd on mould'ring page,
Gleam 'neath the midnight lamp, for unborn sage ;
To tell our dream-like tale to future years,
And wake th' historian's smile, and schoolboy's tears !

Majestic task ! to join, though plac'd afar,
The things that have been, with the things that are !
Important trust ! the awful dead, to scan,
And teach mankind to moralize from man !
Stupendous charge ! when, on the record true,
Depend the dead, and hang the living too !
And, oh ! thrice impious he, who dares abuse
That solemn charge, and good and ill confuse !
Thrice guilty he who, false with ' words of sooth,'
Would pay, to Prejudice, his debt to Truth ;
The hallow'd page of fleeting Time prophane,
And prove to Man that man has liv'd in vain ;
Pass the cold grave, with colder jestings, by ;
And use the truth to illustrate a lie !

Let Gibbon's name be trac'd, in sorrow, here, —
Too great to spurn, too little to revere !
Who follow'd Reason, yet forgot her laws,
And found all causes, but the ' great first Cause : '
The paths of time, with guideless footsteps, trod ;
Blind to the light of nature and of God ;
Deaf to the voice, amid the past's dread hour,
Which sounds his praise, and chronicles his pow'r !
In vain for *him* was Truth's fair tablet spread,
When Prejudice, with jaundiced organs, read.
In vain for *us* the polish'd periods flow,
The fancy kindles, and the pages glow ;
When one bright hour, and startling transport past,
The musing soul must turn — to sigh at last.
Still let the page be luminous and just,
Nor private feeling war with public trust ;
Still let the pen from narrowing views forbear,
And modern faction ancient freedom spare.
But, ah ! too oft th' historian bends his mind
To flatter party — not to serve mankind ;
To make the dead, in living feuds, engage,
And give all time, the feelings of his age.
Great Hume hath stoop'd, the Stuarts' fame, t' increase ;
And ultra Mitford soar'd to libel Greece !

Yet must the candid muse, impartial, learn
To trace the errors which her eyes discern ;
View ev'ry side, investigate each part,
And get the holy scroll of Truth by heart ;
No blame misplac'd, and yet no fault forgot —
Like ink employ'd to write with — not to blot.
Hence, while historians, just reproof, incur,
We find some readers, with their authors, err ;
And soon discover, that as few excel
In reading justly, as in writing well.
For prejudice, or ignorance, is such,
That men believe too little, or too much ;
Too apt to cavil, or too glad to trust,
With confidence misplac'd, or blame unjust.

Seek out no faction — no peculiar school —
But lean on Reason, as your safest rule.
Let doubtful facts, with patient hand, be led,
To take their place on this Procrustian bed !
What, plainly, fits not, may be thrown aside,
Without the censure of pedantic pride :
For nature still, to just proportion, clings ;

And human reason judges natural things.
Moreover, in th' historian's bosom look,
And weigh his feelings ere you trust his book;
His private friendships, private wrongs, descry,
Where tend his passions, where his int'rests lie —
And, while his proper faults your mind engage,
Discern the ruling foibles of his age.
Hence, when on deep research, the work you find
A too obtrusive transcript of his mind;
When you perceive a fact too highly wrought,
Which kindly seems to prove a fav'rite thought;
Or some opposing truth trac'd briefly out,
With hand of careless speed — then turn to doubt!
For private feeling, like the taper, glows,
And here a light, and there a shadow, throws.

If some gay picture, vilely daubed, were seen
With grass of azure, and a sky of green,
Th' impatient laughter we'd suppress in vain,
And deem the painter jesting, or insane.
But, when the sun of blinding prejudice
Glares in our faces, it deceives our eyes;
Truth appears falsehood to the dazzled sight,
The comment apes the fact, and black seems white;
Commingled hues, their separate colors lost,
Dance wildly on, in bright confusion tost;
And, midst their drunken whirl, the giddy eye
Beholds one shapeless blot for earth and sky.

Of such delusions let the mind take heed,
And learn to think, or wisely cease to read;
And, if a style of labor'd grace display
Perverted feelings, in a pleasing way;
False tints, on real objects, brightly laid,
Facts in disguise, and Truth in masquerade —
If cheating thoughts in beauteous dress appear,
With magic sound, to captivate the ear —
Th' enchanting poison of that page decline,
Or drink Circean draughts — and turn to swine!

We hail with British pride, and ready praise,
Enlightened Miller of our modern days!
Too firm though temp'rate, liberal though exact,
To give too much to argument or fact,
To love details, and draw no moral thence,
Or seek the comment, and forget the sense,
He leaves all vulgar aims, and strives alone
To find the ways of Truth, and make them known!

Spirit of life! for aye, with heav'nly breath,
Warm the dull clay, and cold abodes of death!
Clasp in its urn the consecrated dust,
And bind a laurel round the broken bust;
While mid decaying tombs, thy pensive choice,
Thou bidst the silent utter forth a voice,
To prompt the actors of our busy scene,
And tell what *is*, the tale of what *has been!*
Yet turn, Philosophy! with brow sublime,
Shall Science follow on the steps of Time!
As, o'er Thought's measureless depths, we bend to hear
The whispered sound, which stole on Descartes' ear,
Hallowing the sunny visions of his youth
With that eternal mandate, 'Search for Truth!'
Yes! search for Truth — the glorious path is free;
Mind shews her dwelling — Nature holds the key —
Yes! search for Truth — her tongue shall bid thee scan
The book of knowledge, for the use of Man!

Man! Man! thou poor antithesis of power!
Child of all time! yet creature of an hour!
By turns, camelion of a thousand forms,
The lord of empires, and the food of worms!
The little conqueror of a petty space,
The more than mighty, or the worse than base!
Thou ruin'd landmark, in the desert way,
Betwixt the all of glory, and decay!
Fair beams the torch of Science in thine hand,
And sheds its brightness o'er the glimmering land;
While, in thy native grandeur, bold, and free,
Thou bid'st the wilds of nature smile for thee,
And treadest Ocean's paths full royally!
Earth yields her treasures up — celestial air
Receives thy globe of life — when, journeying there,
It bounds from dust, and bends its course on high,
And walks, in beauty, through the wondering sky.
And yet, proud clay! thine empire is a span,
Nor all thy greatness makes thee more than man!
While Knowledge, Science, only serve t' impart
The god thou *would'st* be, and the thing thou *art!*

Where stands the Syracusan — while the roar
Of men, and engines, echoes through the shore?
Where stands the Syracusan? haggard Fate,
With ghastly smile, is sitting at the gate;
And Death forgets his silence 'midst the crash
Of rushing ruins — and the torches' flash
Waves redly on the straggling forms that die;
And masterless steeds, beneath that gleam, dart by,
Scared into madness, by the battle cry —
And sounds are hurtling in the angry air,
Of hate, and pain, and vengeance, and despair —
The smothered voice of babes — the long wild shriek
Of mothers — and the curse the dying speak!
Where stands the Syracusan? tranquil sage,

He bends, sublime, o'er Science' splendid page;
Walks the high circuit of extended mind,
Surpasses man, and dreams not of mankind;
While, on his listless ear, the battle shout
Falls senseless — as if echo breath'd about
The hum of many words, the laughing glee,
Which linger'd there, when Syracuse was free.
Away! away! for louder accents fall —
But not the sounds of joy from marble hall!
Quick steps approach — but not of sylphic feet,
Whose echo heralded a smile more sweet,
Coming, all sport, th' indulgent sage, t' upbraid
For lonely hours, to studious musing, paid —
Be hushed! Destruction bares the flickering blade!
He asked to live, th' unfinished lines to fill,
And died — to solve a problem deeper still.
He died, the glorious! who, with soaring sight,
Sought some new world, to plant his foot of might;
Thereon, in solitary pride, to stand,
And lift our planet, with a master's hand!
He sank in death — Creation only gave
That thorn-encumbered space which forms his grave —
An unknown grave, till Tully chanced to stray,
And named the spot where Archimedes lay!
Genius! behold the limit of thy power!
Thou fir'st the soul — but, when life's dream is o'er,
Giv'st not the silent pulse one throb the more:
And mighty beings come, and pass away,
Like other comets, and like other — clay.

Though analyzing Truth must still divide
Historic state, and scientific pride;
Yet one stale fact, our judging thoughts infer —
Since each is human, each is prone to err!
Oft, in the night of Time, doth History stray,
And lift her lantern, and proclaim it day!
And oft, when day's eternal glories shine,
Doth Science, boasting, cry — 'The light is mine!'
So hard to bear, with unobstructed sight,
Th' excess of darkness, or th' extreme of light.

Yet, to be just, though faults belong to each,
The themes of one, an humbler moral, teach:
And, 'midst th' historian's eloquence, and skill,
The human chronicler is human still.
If on past power, his eager thoughts be cast,
It brings an awful antidote — 't is past!
If, deathless fame, his ravish'd organs scan,
The deathless fame exists for buried man:
Power, and decay, at once he turns to view;
And, with the strength, beholds the weakness too.
Not so, doth Science' musing son aspire;
And pierce creation, with his eye of fire.
Yon mystic pilgrims of the starry way,
No humbling lesson, to his soul, convey;
No tale of change, their changeless course hath taught;
And works divine excite no earthward thought.
And still, he, reckless, builds the splendid dream;
And still, his pride increases with his theme;
And still, the cause is slighted in th' effect;
And still, self-worship follows self-respect.
Too apt to watch the engines of the scene,
And lose the hand, which moves the vast machine;
View Matter's form, and not its moving soul;
Interpret parts, and misconceive the whole:
While, darkly musing 'twixt the earth, and sky,
His heart grows narrow, as his hopes grow high;
And quits, for aye, with unavailing loss,
The sympathies of earth, but not the dross;
Till Time sweeps down the fabric of his trust;
And life, and riches, turn to death, and dust.

And such is Man! 'neath Error's foul assaults,
His noblest moods beget his grossest faults!
When Knowledge lifts her hues of varied grace,
The fair exotic of a brighter place,
To keep her stem, from mundane blasts, enshrin'd,
He makes a fatal hot-bed of his mind;
Too oft adapted, in their growth, to spoil
The natural beauties of a generous soil.
Ah! such is Man! thus strong, and weak withal,
His rise oft renders him too prone to fall!
The loftiest hills' fresh tints, the soonest, fade;
And highest buildings cast the deepest shade!

So Buffon err'd; amidst his chilling dream,
The judgment grew material as the theme:
Musing on Matter, till he called away
The modes of Mind, to form the modes of clay;
And made, confusing each, with judgment blind,
Mind stoop to dust, and dust ascend to Mind.
So Leibnitz err'd; when, in the starry hour,
He read no weakness, where was written, 'Power;'
Beheld the verdant earth, the circling sea;
Nor dreamt so fair a world could cease to be!
Yea! but he heard the Briton's awful name,
As, scattering darkness, in his might, he came,
Girded with Truth, and earnest to confute
What gave to Matter, Mind's best attribute.
Sternly they strove — th' unequal race was run!
The owlet met the eagle at the sun!

While such defects, their various forms, unfold;
And rust, so foul, obscures the brightest gold —
Let Science' soaring sons, the ballast, cast,
But judge their present errors, by their past.

As some poor wanderer, in the darkness, goes,
When fitful wind, in hollow murmur, blows;
Hailing, with trembling joy, the lightning's ray,
Which threats his safety, but illumes his way.

Gross faults buy deep experience. Sages tell
That Truth, like Æsop's fox, is in a well;
And, like the goat, his fable prates about,
Fools must stay in, that wise men may get out.
What thousand scribblers, of our age, would choose
To throw a toga round the English muse;
Rending her garb of ease, which graceful grew
From Dryden's loom, beprankt with varied hue!
In that dull aim, by Mind unsanctified,
What thousand Wits would have their wits belied,
Devoted Southey! if thou had'st not tried!
Use is the aim of Science; this the end
The wise appreciate, and the good commend.
For not, like babes, the flaming torch, we prize,
That sparkling lustre may attract our eyes;
But that, when evening shades impede the sight,
It casts, on objects round, a useful light.

Use is the aim of Science! give again
A golden sentence to the faithful pen —
Dwell not on parts! for parts contract the mind;
And knowledge still is useless, when confined.
The yearning soul, inclosed in narrow bound,
May be ingenious, but is ne'er profound:
Spoil'd of its strength, the fettered thought grows tame;
And want of air extinguishes the flame!
And as the sun, beheld in mid-day blaze,
Seems turned to darkness, as we strive to gaze;
So mental vigor, on one object, cast,
That object's self becomes obscured at last.
'T is easy, as Experience may aver,
To pass from general to particular.
But most laborious to direct the soul
From studying parts, to reason on the whole:
Thoughts, train'd on narrow subjects, to let fall;
And learn the unison of each with all.

In Nature's reign, a scale of life, we find:
A scale of knowledge, we behold, in mind;
With each progressive link, our steps ascend,
And traverse all, before they reach the end;
Searching, while Reason's powers may farther go,
The things we know not, by the things we know.

But hold! methinks some sons of Thought demand,
'Why strive to form the Trajan's vase in sand?
Are Reason's paths so few, that Mind may call
Her finite energies, to tread them all?
Lo! Learning's waves, in bounded channel, sweep;
When they flow wider, shall they run as deep?
Shall that broad surface, no dull shallow, hide,
Growing dank weeds of superficial pride?
Then Heaven may leave our giant powers alone;
Nor give each soul a focus of its own!
Genius bestows, in vain, the chosen page,
If all the tome, the minds of all, engage!'

Nay! I reply — with free congenial breast,
Let each peruse the part, which suits him best!
But, lest contracting prejudice mislead,
Regard the context, as he turns to read!
Hence, liberal feeling gives th' enlighten'd soul,
The spirit, with the letter of the scroll.

With what triumphant joy, what glad surprise,
The dull behold the dullness of the wise!
What insect tribes of brainless impudence
Buzz round the carcase of perverted sense!
What railing ideots hunt, from classic school,
Each flimsy sage, and scientific fool,
Crying, ''T is well! we see the blest effect
Of watchful night, and toiling intellect!'
Yet let them pause, and tremble — vainly glad;
For too much learning maketh no man mad!
Too *little* dims the sight, and leads us o'er
The twilight path, where fools have been before;
With not enough of Reason's radiance seen,
To track the footsteps, where those fools have been.

Divinest Newton! if my pen may shew
A name so mighty, in a verse so low, —
Still let the sons of Science, joyful, claim
The bright example of that splendid name!
Still let their lips repeat, my page bespeak,
The sage how learned! and the man how meek!
Too wise, to think his human folly less;
Too great, to doubt his proper littleness;
Too strong, to deem his weakness past away;
Too high in soul, to glory in his clay:
Rich in all nature, but her erring side:
Endow'd with all of Science — but its pride.

ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND BOOK

Metaphysics — Address to Metaphysicians — The most considerable portion of their errors conceived to arise from difficulties attending the use of words — That on one hand, thoughts become obscure without the assistance of language, while on the other, language from its material analogy deteriorates from spiritual meaning — Allusion to a probable mode of communication between spirits after death — That a limited respect, though not a servile submission, is due to verbal distinctions — Clearness of style peculiarly necessary to Metaphysical subjects — The graces of Composition not inconsistent with them — Plato, Bacon, Bolingbroke — The extremes into which Philosophers have fallen with regard to sensation, and reflection — Berkeley, Condillac — That subject briefly considered — Abstractions — Longinus, Burke, Price, Payne Knight — Blind submission to authorities deprecated — The Pythagorean saying opposed, and Cicero's unphilosophical assertion alluded to — That, however, it partakes of injustice to love Truth, and yet refuse our homage to the advocates of Truth — How the names of great writers become endeared to us by early recollections — Description of the School-boy's first intellectual gratifications — That even without reference to the past, some immortal names are entitled to our veneration, since they are connected with Truth — Bacon — Apostrophe to Locke.

Poetry is introduced — More daring than Philosophy, she personifies abstractions, and brings the things unseen before the eye of the Mind — How often reason is indebted to poetic imagery — Irving — The poetry of prose — Plato's ingratitude — Philosophers and Poets contrasted — An attempt to define Poetry — That the passions make use of her language — Nature the poet's study — Shakespeare — Human nature as seen in cities — Scenic nature, and how the mind is affected thereby — That Poetry exists not in the object contemplated, but is created by the contemplating mind — The ideal — Observations on the structure of verse, as adapted to the subject treated — Milton, Horace, Pope — The French Drama — Corneille, Racine — Harmony and chasteness of versification — The poem proceeds to argue, that the muse will refuse her inspiration to a soul unattuned to generous sympathy, unkindled by the deeds of Virtue, or the voice of Freedom — Contemptuous notice of those prompted only by interest to aspire to poetic eminence — What should be the Poet's best guerdon — From the contemplation of motives connected with Freedom, we are led by no unnatural transition to Greece — Her present glorious struggle — Anticipation of her ultimate independence, and the restoration of the Muses to their ancient seats — Allusion to the death of Byron — Reflections on Mortality — The terrors of death as beheld by the light of Nature — The consolations of death as beheld with reference to a future state — Contemplation of the immortality of Mind, and her perfected powers — Conclusion.

BOOK II

But now to higher themes! no more confin'd
To copy Nature, Mind returns to Mind.
We leave the throng, so nobly, and so well,
Tracing, in Wisdom's book, things visible, —
And turn to things unseen; where, greatly wrought,
Soul questions soul, and thought revolves on thought.
My spirit loves, my voice shall hail ye, now,
Sons of the patient eye, and passionless brow!
Students sublime! Earth, man, unmov'd, ye view,
Time, circumstance; for what are they to you?
What is the crash of worlds, — the fall of kings, —
When worlds and monarchs are such brittle things!
What the tost, shatter'd bark, that blindly dares
A sea of storm? Ye sketch the wave which bears!
The cause, and not th' effect, your thoughts exact;
The principle of action, not the act, —
The soul! the soul! and, 'midst so grand a task,
Ye call her rushing passions, and ye ask
Whence are ye? and each mystic thing responds!
I would be all *ye* are — except those bonds!

Except those bonds! ev'n here is oft descried
The love to parts, the poverty of pride!
Ev'n here, while Mind, in Mind's horizon, springs,
Her 'native mud' is weighing on her wings!
Ev'n here, while Truth invites the ardent crowd,
Ixion-like, they rush t' embrace a cloud!
Ev'n here, oh! foul reproach to human wit!
A Hobbes hath reasoned, and Spinosa writ!

Rank pride does much! and yet we justly cry,
Our greatest errors in our weakness lie.
For thoughts uncloth'd by language are, at best,
Obscure; while grossness injures those exprest —
Through words, — in whose analysis, we find
Th' analogies of Matter, not of Mind:
Hence, when the use of words is graceful brought,
As physical dress to metaphysic thought,
The thought, howe'er sublime its pristine state,
Is by th' expression made degenerate;
Its spiritual essence changed, or cramp'd; and hence
Some hold by words, who cannot hold by sense;
And leave the thought behind, and take th' attire —
Elijah's mantle — but without his fire!
Yet spurn not words! 't is needful to confess
They give ideas, a body and a dress!
Behold them traverse Learning's region round,
The vehicles of thought on wheels of sound;
Mind's winged strength, wherewith the height is won,
Unless she trust their frailty to the sun.
Destroy the body! — will the spirit stay?
Destroy the car! — will Thought pursue her way?
Destroy the wings — let Mind their aid forego!
Do no Icarian billows yawn below?
Ah! spurn not words with reckless insolence;
But still admit their influence with the sense,

And fear to slight their laws! Perchance we find
No perfect code transmitted to mankind;
And yet mankind, till life's dark sands are run,
Prefers imperfect government to none.
Thus Thought must bend to words! — Some sphere of bliss,
Ere long, shall free her from th' alloy of this:
Some kindred home for Mind — some holy place,
Where spirits look on spirits, 'face to face,' —
Where souls may see, as they themselves are seen,
And voiceless intercourse may pass between,
All pure — all free! as light, which doth appear
In its own essence, incorrupt and clear!
One service, praise! one age, eternal youth!
One tongue, intelligence! one subject, truth!

Till then, no freedom, Learning's search affords,
Of soul from body, or of thought from words.
For thought may lose, in struggling to be hence,
The gravitating power of Common-sense;
Through all the depths of space with Phaeton hurl'd,
T' impair our reason, as he scorch'd our world.
Hence, this preceptive truth, my page affirms —
Respect the technicality of terms!
Yet not in base submission — lest we find
That, aiding clay, we crouch too low for Mind;
Too apt conception's essence to forget,
And place all wisdom in the alphabet.

Still let appropriate phrase the sense invest;
That what is well conceived be well exprest!
Nor e'er the reader's wearied brain engage,
In hunting meaning down the mazy page,
With three long periods tortured into one,
The sentence ended, with the sense begun;
Nor in details, which schoolboys know by heart,
Perplex each turning with the terms of art.
To understand, we deem no common good;
And 't is less easy to be *understood*.
But let not clearness be your only praise,
When style may charm a thousand different ways;
In Plato glow, to life and glory wrought,
By high companionship with noblest thought;
In Bacon, warm abstraction with a breath,
Catch Poesy's bright beams, and smile beneath;
In St. John roll, a generous stream, along,
Correctly free, and regularly strong.
Nor scornful deem the effort out of place,
With taste to reason, and convince with grace;
But ponder wisely, ere you know, too late,
Contempt of trifles will not prove us great!
The Cynics, not their tubs, respect engage;
And dirty tunic never made a sage.
E'en Cato — had he own'd the Senate's will,
And wash'd his toga — had been Cato still.
Justly we censure — yet are free to own,
That indecision is a crime unknown.
For, never faltering, seldom reasoning long,
And still most positive whene'er most wrong,
No theoretic sage is apt to fare
Like Mah'met's coffin — hung in middle air!
No! fenc'd by Error's all-sufficient trust,
These stalk 'in nubibus' — those crawl in dust.
From their proud height, the first demand to know,
If spiritual essence should descend more low?
The last, as vainly, from their dunghill, cry,
Can body's grossness hope t' aspire more high?
And while Reflection's empire, these disclose,
Sensation's sovereign right is told by those.
Lo! Berkeley proves an old hypothesis!
'Out on the senses!' (he was out of his!)
'All is idea! and nothing real springs
But God, and Reason' — (not the right of kings?)
'Hold!' says Condillac with profound surprise —
'Why prate of Reason? we have ears and eyes!'

Condillac! while the dangerous periods fall
Upon thy page, to stamp sensation *all*;
While (coldly studious!) thine ingenious scroll
Endows the mimic statue with a soul
Compos'd of sense — behold the generous hound —
His piercing eye, his ear awake to sound,
His scent, most delicate organ! and declare
What triumph hath the 'Art of thinking' there!
What Gall, or Spurzheim, on his front hath sought
The mystic bumps indicative of Thought?
Or why, if Thought *do* there maintain her throne,
Will reasoning curs leave logic for a bone?

Mind is imprison'd in a lonesome tower:
Sensation is its window — hence herb, flower,
Landscapes all sun, the rush of thousand springs,
Waft in sweet scents, fair sights, soft murmurings;
And in her joy, she gazeth — yet ere long,
Reason awaketh in her, bold and strong,
And o'er the scene exerting secret laws,
First seeks th' efficient, then the final cause,
Abstracts from forms their hidden accidents,
And marks in outward substance, inward sense.

Our first perceptions formed — we search, to find
The operations of the forming mind;
And turn within by Reason's certain route,
To view the shadows of the things without
Discern'd, retain'd, compar'd, combin'd, and brought
To mere abstraction, by abstracting Thought.

Hence to discern, retain, compare, connect,
We deem the faculties of Intellect;
The which, mus'd on, exert a new control,
And fresh ideas are open'd on the soul.

Sensation is a stream with dashing spray,
That shoots in idle speed its arrowy way; 760
When lo! the mill arrests its waters' course,
Turning to use their unproductive force:
The cunning wheels by foamy currents sped,
Reflection triumphs, — and mankind is fed!

Since Pope hath shewn, and Learning still must shew,
'We cannot reason but from what we know,' —
Unfold the scroll of Thought; and turn to find
The undeceiving signature of Mind!
There, judge her nature by her nature's course,
And trace her actions upwards to their source.
So when the property of Mind we call 771
An essence, or a substance spiritual,
We name her thus, by marking how she clings
Less to the forms than essences of things;
For body clings to body — objects seen
And substance sensible alone have been
Sensation's study; while reflective Mind,
Essence unseen in objects seen may find;
And, tracing whence her known impressions came,
Give single forms an universal name. 780

So, when particular sounds in concord rise,
Those sounds as *melody*, we generalize;
When pleasing shapes and colors blend, the soul
Abstracts th' idea of *beauty* from the whole,
Deducting thus, by Mind's enchanting spell,
The intellectual from the sensible.
Hence bold Longinus' splendid periods grew,
'Who was himself the great sublime he drew:'
Hence Burke, the poet-reasoner, learn'd to trace
His glowing style of energetic grace: 790
Hence thoughts, perchance, some favor'd bosoms move,
Which Price might own, and classic Knight approve!

Go! light a rushlight, ere the day is done,
And call its glimm'ring brighter than the sun!
Go! while the stars in midnight glory beam,
Prefer their cold reflection in the stream!
But be not that dull slave, who only looks
On Reason, 'through the spectacles of books!'
Rather by Truth determine what is true, —
And reasoning works, through Reason's medium, view; 800
For authors can't monopolize her light:
'T is your's to read, as well as their's to write.
To judge is your's! — then why submissive call,
'The master said so?' — 't is no rule at all!
Shall passive sufferance e'en to mind belong,
When right divine in man is human wrong?
Shall a high name a low idea enhance,
When all may fail, as some succeed — by chance?
Shall fix'd chimeras unfix'd reason shock?
And if Locke err, must thousands err with Locke? 810
Men! claim your charter! spurn th' unjust control,
And shake the bondage from the free-born soul!
Go walk the porticoes! and teach your youth
All names are bubbles, but the name of Truth!
If fools, by chance, attend to Wisdom's rules,
'T is no dishonor to be right with fools,
If human faults to Plato's page belong,
Not ev'n with Plato, willingly go wrong.
But though the judging page declare it well
To love Truth better than the lips which tell;
Yet 't were an error, with injustice class'd, 821
T' adore the former, and neglect the last.

Oh! beats there, Heav'n! a heart of human frame,
Whose pulses throb not at some kindling name?
Some sound, which brings high musings in its track,
Or calls perchance the days of childhood back,
In its dear echo, — when, without a sigh,
Swift hoop, and bounding ball, were first laid by,
To clasp in joy, from school-room tyrant, free,
The classic volume on the little knee, 830
And con sweet sounds of dearest minstrelsy,
Or words of sterner lore; the young brow fraught
With a calm brightness which might mimic thought,
Leant on the boyish hand — as, all the while,
A half-heav'd sigh, or aye th' unconscious smile
Would tell how, o'er that page, the soul was glowing,
In an internal transport, past the knowing!
How feelings, erst unfelt, did then appear,
Give forth a voice, and murmur, 'We are here!'
As lute-strings, which a strong hand plays upon; 840
Or Memnon's statue singing 'neath the sun.
Ah me! for such are pleasant memories —
And call the tears of fondness to our eyes
Reposing on this gone-by dream — when thus,
One marbled book was all the world to us;
The gentlest bliss our innocent thoughts could find —
The happiest cradle of our infant mind!
And though such hours be past, we shall not less
Think on their joy with grateful tenderness;
And bless the page which bade our reason wake, — 850
And love the prophet, for his mission's sake.
But not alone doth Memory's smouldering flame
Reflect a radiance on a glorious name;

For there are names of pride; and they who bear
Have walked with Truth, and turn'd their footsteps where
We walk not — their beholdings aye have been
O'er Mind's far countries which we have not seen —
Our thoughts are not their thoughts! — and oft we dream
That light upon the awful brow doth gleam,
From that high converse; as when Moses trod
Towards the people, from the mount of God,
His lips were silent, but his face was bright,
And prostrate Israel trembled at the sight.

What tongue can syllable our Bacon's name,
Nor own a heart exulting in his fame?
Where prejudice' wild blasts were wont to blow;
And waves of ignorance roll'd dark below,
He raised his sail — and left the coast behind, —
Sublime Columbus of the realms of Mind!
Dared folly's mists, opinion's treacherous sands,
And walk'd, with godlike step, th' untrodden lands!
But ah! our Muse of Britain, standing near,
Hath dimm'd my tablet with a pensive tear!
Thrice, the proud theme, her free-born voice essays, —
And thrice that voice is faltering in his praise —
Yea! till her eyes in silent triumph turn
To mark afar her Locke's sepulchral urn!
Oh urn! where students rapturous vigils keep,
Where sages envy, and where patriots weep!
Oh Name! that bids my glowing spirit wake —
To freemen's hearts endeared for Freedom's sake!
Oh soul! too bright in life's corrupting hour,
To rise by faction, or to crouch to power!
While radiant Genius lifts her heav'nward wing,
And human bosoms own the Mind I sing;
While British writers British thoughts record,
And England's press is fearless as her sword;
While, 'mid the seas which gird our favor'd isle,
She clasps her charter'd rights with conscious smile;
So long be *thou* her glory, and her guide,
Thy page her study, and thy name her pride!
Oh! ever thus, immortal Locke, belong,
First to my heart, as noblest in my song;
And since in thee, the muse enraptured find
A moral greatness, and creating mind,
Still may thine influence, which with honor'd light
Beams when I read, illume me as I write!
The page too guiltless, and the soul too free,
To call a frown from Truth, or blush from thee!
But where Philosophy would fear to soar,
Young Poesy's elastic steps explore!
Her fairy foot, her daring eye pursues
The light of faith — nor trembles as she views!
Wont o'er the Psalmist's holy harp to hang,
And swell the sacred note when Milton sang;
Mingling reflection's chords with fancy's lays,
The tones of music with the voice of praise!

And while Philosophy, in spirit, free,
Reasons, believes, yet cannot plainly *see*,
Poetic Rapture, to her dazzled sight,
Portrays the shadows of the things of light;
Delighting o'er the unseen worlds to roam,
And waft the pictures of perfection home.
Thus Reason oft the aid of fancy seeks,
And strikes Pierian chords — when Irving speaks!

Oh! silent be the withering tongue of those
Who call each page, bereft of measure, prose;
Who deem the Muse possest of such faint spells,
That like poor fools, she glories in her *bells;*
Who hear her voice alone in tinkling chime,
And find a line's whole magic in its rhyme;
Forgetting, if the gilded shrine be fair,
What purer spirit may inhabit there!
For such, — indignant at her questioned might,
Let Genius cease to charm — and Scott to write!

Ungrateful Plato! o'er thy cradled rest,
The Muse hath hung, and all her love exprest;
Thy first imperfect accents fondly taught,
And warm'd thy visions with poetic thought!
Ungrateful Plato! should her deadliest foe
Be found within the breast she tended so?
Spoil'd of her laurels, should she weep to find
The best belov'd become the most unkind?
And was it well or generous, Brutus like,
To pierce the hand that gave the power to strike?

Sages, by reason, reason's powers direct;
Bards, through the heart, convince the intellect.
Philosophy majestic brings to view
Mind's perfect modes, and fair proportions too;
Enchanting Poesy bestows the while,
Upon its sculptured grace, her magic smile,
Bids the cold form, with living radiance glow,
And stamps existence on its marble brow!
For Poesy's whole essence, when defined,
Is elevation of the reasoning mind,
When inward sense from Fancy's page is taught,
And moral feeling ministers to Thought.
And hence, the natural passions all agree
In seeking Nature's language — poetry.
When Hope, in soft perspective, from afar,
Sees lovely scenes more lovely than they are;
To deck the landscape, tiptoe Fancy brings
Her plastic shapes, and bright imaginings.
Or when man's breast by torturing pangs is stung,
If fearful silence cease t' enchain his tongue,

In metaphor, the feelings seek relief,
And all the soul grows eloquent with grief.

Poetic fire, like Vesta's, pure and bright,
Should draw from Nature's sun, its holy light.
With Nature, should the musing poet roam,
And steal instruction from her classic tome;
When 'neath her guidance, least inclin'd to err —
The ablest painter when he copies *her*.

Beloved Shakespeare! England's dearest fame!
Dead is the breast that swells not at thy name!
Whether thine Ariel skim the seas along,
Floating on wings etherial as his song —
Lear rave amid the tempest — or Macbeth
Question the hags of hell on midnight heath —
Immortal Shakespeare! still, thy lips impart
The noblest comment on the human heart.
And as fair Eve, in Eden newly placed,
Gazed on her form, in limpid waters traced,
And stretch'd her gentle arms, with pleased surprise,
To meet the image of her own bright eyes —
So Nature, on thy magic page, surveys
Her sportive graces, and untutored ways!
Wondering, the soft reflection doth she see,
Then laughing owns she loves herself in thee!

Shun not the haunts of crowded cities then;
Nor e'er, as man, forget to study men!
What though the tumult of the town intrude
On the deep silence, and the lofty mood;
'T will make thy human sympathies rejoice,
To hear the music of a human voice —
To watch strange brows by various reason wrought,
To claim the interchange of thought with thought;
T' associate mind with mind, for Mind's own weal,
As steel is ever sharpen'd best by steel.
T' impassion'd bards, the scenic world is dear, —
But Nature's glorious masterpiece is here!
All poetry is beauty, but exprest
In inward essence, not in outward vest.
Hence lovely scenes, reflective poets find,
Awake their lovelier images in Mind:
Nor doth the pictur'd earth, the bard invite,
The lake of azure, or the heav'n of light,
But that his swelling breast arouses there,
Something less visible, and much more fair!
There is a music in the landscape round, —
A silent voice, that speaks without a sound —
A witching spirit, that reposing near,
Breathes to the heart, but comes not to the ear!
These softly steal, his kindling soul t' embrace,
And natural beauty, gild with moral grace.
Think not, when summer breezes tell their tale,
The poet's thoughts are with the summer gale;
Think not his Fancy builds her elfin dream
On painted floweret, or on sighing stream:
No single objects cause his raptured starts,
For Mind is narrow'd, not inspir'd by parts;
But o'er the scene the poet's spirit broods,
To warm the thoughts that form his noblest moods;
Peopling his solitude with faëry play,
And beckoning shapes that whisper him away, —
While lilied fields, and hedge-row blossoms white,
And hills, and glittering streams, are full in sight —
The forests wave, the joyous sun beguiles,
And all the poetry of Nature smiles!

Such poetry is formed by Mind, and not
By scenic grace of one peculiar spot.
The artist lingers in the moon-lit glade,
And light and shade, with him, are — light and shade.
The philosophic chymist wandering there,
Dreams of the soil, and nature of the air.
The rustic marks the young herbs' fresh'ning hue,
And only thinks — his scythe may soon pass through!
None 'muse on nature with a Poet's eye,'
None read, but Poets, Nature's poetry!
Its characters are trac'd in mystic hand,
And all may gaze, but few can understand.

Nor here alone the Poet's dwelling rear,
Though Beauty's voice perchance is sweetest here!
Bind not his footsteps to the sylvan scene,
To heathy banks, fair woods, and valleys green,
When Mind is all his own! her dear impress
Shall throw a magic o'er the wilderness,
As o'er the blossoming vale, and aye recall
Its shadowy plane, and silvery waterfall,
Or sleepy crystal pool, reposing by,
To give the earth a picture of the sky!
Such, gazed on by the spirit, are, I ween,
Lovelier than ever prototype was seen;
For Fancy teacheth Memory's hand to trace
Nature's ideal form in Nature's place.

In every theme by lofty Poet sung,
The thought should seem to speak, and not the tongue.
When godlike Milton lifts th' exalted song,
The subject bears the burning words along —
Resounds the march of Thought, th' o'erflowing line,
Full cadence, solemn pause, and strength divine!
When Horace chats his neighbor's faults away,
The sportive measures, like his muse, are gay;
For once Good-humor Satire's by-way took,
And all his soul is laughing in his book!
On moral Pope's didactic page is found,
Sound rul'd by sense, and sense made clear by sound;
The power to reason, and the taste to please,
While, as the subject varies in degrees,
He stoops with dignity, and soars with ease.

Hence let our Poets, with discerning glance,
Forbear to imitate the stage of France.

What though Corneille arouse the thrilling chords,
And walk with Genius o'er th' inspirëd boards;
What though his rival bring, with calmer grace,
The classic unities of time and place, —
All polish, and all eloquence — 't were mean
To leave the path of Nature for Racine;
When Nero's parent, 'midst her woe, defines
The wrong that tortures — in two hundred lines:
Or when Orestes, madden'd by his crime,
Forgets life, joy, and every thing — but rhyme.

While thus to character and nature, true,
Still keep the harmony of verse in view;
Yet not in changeless concord, — it should be
Though graceful, nervous, — musical, though free;
Not clogg'd by useless drapery, not beset
By the superfluous word, or epithet,
Wherein Conception only dies in state,
As Draco, smother'd by the garments' weight —
But join, Amphion-like, (whose magic fire
Won the deep music of the Maian lyre,
To call Bœotia's city from the ground,)
The just in structure, with the sweet in sound.

Nor this the whole — the poet's classic strain
May flow in smoothest numbers, yet in vain;
And Taste may please, and Fancy sport awhile,
And yet Aonia's muse refuse to smile!
For lo! her heavenly lips these words reveal —
'The sage may coldly *think*, the bard must *feel!*
And if his writings, to his heart untrue,
Would ape the fervent throb it never knew;
If generous deeds, and Virtue's noblest part,
And Freedom's voice, could never warm that heart;
If Interest tax'd the produce of the brain,
And fetter'd Genius follow'd in her train,
Weeping as each unwilling word she spoke, —
Then hush the lute — its master string is broke!
In vain, the skilful hand may linger o'er —
Concord is dead, and music speaks no more!'

There are, and have been such — they were forgot
If shame could veil their page, if tears could blot!
There are, and have been, whose dishonor'd lay
Aspired t' enrapture that the world might — pay!
Whose life was one long bribe, oft counted o'er, —
Brib'd to think on, and brib'd to think no more;
Brib'd to laugh, weep, nor ask the reason why;
Brib'd to tell truth, and brib'd to gild a lie!
Oh Man! for this, the sensual left behind,
We boast our empire o'er the vast of Mind?
Oh Mind! reported valueless, till sold,
Thought dross till metamorphos'd into gold
By Midas' touch — breath'st thou immortal verse
To throw a ducat in an empty purse —
To walk the market at a belman's cry,
For knaves to sell, and wond'ring fools to buy?
Can Heav'n-born bards, undone by lucre's lust,
Crouch thus, like Heav'n-born ministers, to dust?
Alas! to dust indeed — yet wherefore blame?
They keep their profits, though they lose their fame.

Leave to the dross they seek, the grovelling throng,
And swell with nobler aim th' Aonian song!
Enough for thee uninfluenc'd and unhir'd,
If Truth reward the strain herself inspir'd!
Enough for thee, if grateful Man commend,
If Genius love, and Virtue call thee friend!
Enough for thee, to wake th' exalted mood,
Reprove the erring, and confirm the good;
Excite the tender smile, the generous tear,
Or rouse the thought to loftiest Nature dear,
Which rapturous greets amidst the fervent line
Thy name, O Freedom! glorious Hellas, thine!

I love my own dear land — it doth rejoice
The soul, to stretch my arms, and lift my voice,
To tell her of my love! I love her green
And bowery woods, her hills in mossy sheen,
Her silver running waters — there 's no spot
In all her dwelling, which my breast loves not —
No place not heart-enchanted! Sunnier skies,
And calmer waves, may meet another's eyes;
I love the sullen mist, the stormy sea,
The winds of rushing strength which, like the land, are free!
Such is my love — yet turning thus to thee,
Oh Græcia! I must hail with hardly less
Of joy, and pride, and deepening tenderness,
And feelings wild, I know not to control,
My other country — country of my soul!
For so, to me, thou art! my lips have sung
Of thee with childhood's lisp, and harp unstrung!
In thee, my Fancy's pleasant walks have been,
Telling her tales, while Memory wept between!
And now *for* thee I joy, with heart beguiled,
As if a dying friend looked up, and smiled.

Lo! o'er Ægæa's waves, the shout hath ris'n!
Lo! Hope hath burst the fetters of her prison!
And Glory sounds the trump along the shore,
And Freedom walks where Freedom walk'd before!
Ipsara glimmers with heroic light,
Redd'ning the waves that lash her flaming height;
And Ægypt hurries from that dark blue sea!

Lo! o'er the cliffs of fam'd Thermopylæ,
And voiceful Marathon, the wild winds sweep,
Bearing this message to the brave who sleep —
'They come! they come! with their embattled shock,
From Pelion's steep, and Paros' foam-dash'd rock!
They come from Tempe's vale, and Helicon's spring,
And proud Eurotas' banks, the river king!
They come from Leuctra, from the waves that kiss
Athena — from the shores of Salamis;
From Sparta, Thebes, Eubœa's hills of blue —
To live with Hellas — or to sleep with you!'

Smile — smile, beloved land! and though no lay
From Doric pipe, may charm thy glades to-day —
Though dear Ionic music murmur not
Adown the vale — its echo all forgot!
Yet smile, beloved land! for soon, around,
Thy silent earth shall utter forth a sound,
As whilom — and, its pleasant groves among,
The Grecian voice shall breathe the Grecian song,
While the exilèd muse shall 'habit still
The happy haunts of her Parnassian hill.
Till then, behold the cold dumb sepulchre —
The ruin'd column — ocean, earth, and air,
Man, and his wrongs — thou hast Tyrtæus there!
And pardon, if across the heaving main,
Sound the far melody of minstrel strain,
In wild and fitful gust from England's shore,
For *his* immortal sake, who never more
Shall tread with living foot, and spirit free,
Her fields, or breathe her passionate poetry —
The pilgrim bard, who lived, and died for thee,
Oh land of Memory! loving thee no less
Than parent — with the filial tenderness,
And holy ardor of the Argive son,
Straining each nerve to bear thy chariot on —
Till when its wheels the place of glory swept,
He laid him down before the shrine — and slept.

So be it! at his cold unconscious bier,
We fondly sate, and dropp'd the natural tear —
Yet wept not wisely, for he sank to rest
On the dear earth his waking thoughts loved best,
And gently life's last pulses stole away!
No Moschus sang a requiem o'er his clay,
But Greece was sad! and breathed above, below,
The warrior's sigh, the silence, and the woe!

And is this all? Is this the little sum
For which we toil — to which our glories come?
Doth History bend her mouldering pages o'er,
And Science stretch her bulwark from the shore,
And Sages search the mystic paths of Thought,
And Poets charm with lays that Genius taught —
For this? to labor through their little day,
To weep an hour, then want the tear they pay —
To ask the urn, their death and life to tell,
When the dull dust would give that tale as well!

Man! hast thou seen the gallant vessel sweep,
Borrowing her moonlight from the jealous deep,
And gliding with mute foot, and silver wing,
Over the waters like a soul-mov'd thing?
Man, hast thou gazed on this — then look'd again,
And seen no speck on all that desolate main,
And heard no sound, — except the gurgling cry,
The winds half stifled in their mockery?

Woe unto thee! for, thus, thy course is run,
And, in the fulness of thy noon-day sun,
The darkness cometh — yea! thou walk'st abroad
In glory, Child of Mind, Creation's Lord —
And wisdom's music from thy lips hath gush'd!
Then comes the *Selah!* and the voice is hush'd,
And the light past! we seek where thou hast been
In beauty — but thy beauty is not seen!
We breathe the air thou breath'dst, we tread the spot
Thy feet were wont to tread, but find thee not!
Beyond, sits Darkness with her haggard face,
Brooding fiend-like above thy burying-place —
Beneath, let wildest Fancy take her fill!
Shall we seek on? we shudder and are still!
Yet woe not unto thee, thou child of Earth!
Though moonlight sleep on thy deserted hearth,
We will not cry 'Alas!' above thy clay!
It was, perchance, thy joyous pride to stray
On Mind's lone shore, and linger by the way:
But now thy pilgrim's staff is laid aside,
And on thou journeyest o'er the sullen tide,
To bless thy wearied sight, and glad thine heart
With all that Mind's serener skies impart;
Where Wisdom suns the day no shades destroy,
And Learning ends in Truth, as hope in joy:
While *we* stand mournful on the desert beach,
And wait, and wish, thy distant bark, to reach,
And weep to watch it passing from our sight,
And sound the gun's salute, and sigh our last 'good night!'

And oh! while thus the spirit glides away, —
Give to the world its memory with its clay!
Some page our country's grateful eyes may scan;
Some useful truth to bless surviving man;
Some name to honest bosoms justly dear;
Some grave t' exalt the thought, and claim the tear;
So when the pilgrim Sun is travelling o'er
The last blue hill, to gild a distant shore,
He leaves a freshness in the evening scene,
That tells Creation where his steps have been!

II. SOME ACCOUNT OF THE GREEK CHRISTIAN POETS

The series of papers on the Greek Christian Poets appeared first in the *Athenæum* between the months of February and August, 1842. They were reprinted along with a second series of papers on the English poets — contributed to the same periodical — in a small separate volume, two years after Mrs. Browning's death. (*The Greek Christian Poets and The English Poets, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, London. Chapman and Hall*, 1863.) As a mere girl, Miss Barrett had read the Greek Fathers in the original, under the guidance of the blind scholar, Hugh Stuart Boyd, who was deeply versed in them and could repeat from memory pages of their works both in prose and verse. A playful allusion to his especial enthusiasm for Saint Gregory Nazianzen occurs in Mrs. Browning's poem 'Wine of Cyprus,' which was dedicated to Mr. Boyd.

> 'Do you mind that deed of Atè
> Which you bound me to so fast,
> Reading "*De Virginitate*,"
> From the first line to the last?
> How I said, at ending solemn,
> As I turned and looked at you,
> That Saint Simeon on the column
> Had had somewhat less to do?'

The Greek language was a strong intellectual life, stronger than any similar one which has lived in the breath of 'articulately speaking men,' and survived it. No other language has lived so long and died so hard, — pang by pang, each with a dolphin color — yielding reluctantly to that doom of death and silence which must come at last to the speaker and the speech. Wonderful it is to look back fathoms down the great Past, thousands of years away — where whole generations lie unmade to dust — where the sounding of their trumpets, and the rushing of their scythed chariots, and that great shout which brought down the birds stone dead from beside the sun, are more silent than the dog breathing at our feet, or the fly's paces on our window-pane; and yet, from the heart of which silence, to feel *words* rise up like a smoke — words of men, even words of women, uttered at first, perhaps, in 'excellent low voices,' but audible and distinct to our times, through 'the dreadful pother' of life and death, the hissing of the steam-engine and the cracking of the cerement! It is wonderful to look back and listen. Blind Homer spoke this Greek after blind Demodocus, with a quenchless light about his brows, which he felt through his blindness. Pindar rolled his chariots in it, prolonging the clamor of the games. Sappho's heart beat through it, and heaved up the world's. Æschylus strained it to the stature of his high thoughts. Plato crowned it with his divine peradventures. Aristophanes made it drunk with the wine of his fantastic merriment. The latter Platonists wove their souls away in it, out of sight of other souls. The first Christians heard in it God's new revelation, and confessed their Christ in it from the suppliant's knee, and presently from the bishop's throne. To all times, and their transitions, the language lent itself. Through the long summer of above two thousand years, from the grasshopper Homer sang of, to that grasshopper of Manuel Phile, which might indeed have been 'a burden,' we can in nowise mistake the chirping of the bloodless, deathless, wondrous creature. It chirps on in Greek still. At the close of that long summer, though Greece lay withered to her root, her academic groves and philosophic gardens all leafless and bare, still from the depth of the desolation rose up the voice —

> O cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
> Or but a wandering voice? —

which did not grow hoarse, like other cuckoos, but sang not unsweetly, if more faintly than before. Strangely vital was this Greek language —

> Some straggling spirits were behind, to be
> Laid out with most thrift on its memory.

It seemed as if nature could not part with so lovely a tune, as if she felt it ringing on still in her head — or as if she hummed it to herself, as the watchman used to do, with 'night wandering round' him, when he watched wearily on the palace roof of the doomed house of Atreus.

But, although it is impossible to touch with a thought the last estate of Greek poetical literature without the wonder occurring of its being still Greek, still poetry, — though we are startled by the phenomenon of lifelike sounds coming up from the ashes of a mighty people — at the aspect of an Alcestis returned from the dead, *veiled* but identical, — we are forced to admit, after the first pause of admiration, that a change has passed upon the great thing we recognize, a change proportionate to the greatness, and involving a caducity. Therefore, in adventuring some imperfect account of the Greek ecclesiastical poets, it is right to premise it with the full and frank admission, that they are not accomplished poets, — that they do not, in fact, reach with their highest lifted hand, the lowest foot of those whom the world has honored as Greek poets, but who have honored the world more by their poetry. The instrument of the Greek tongue was, at the Christian era, an antique instrument, somewhat worn, somewhat stiff in the playing, somewhat deficient in notes which it had once, somewhat feeble and uncertain in such as it retained. The subtlety of the ancient music, the variety of its cadences, the intersections of sweetness in the rise and fall of melodies, rounded and contained in the unity of its harmony, are as utterly lost to this later period as the digamma was to an earlier one. We must not seek for them; we shall not find them; their place knows them no more. Not only was there a lack in the instrument, — there was also a deficiency in the players. Thrown aside, after the old flute-story, by a goddess, it was taken up by a mortal hand — by the hand of men gifted and noble in their generation, but belonging to it intellectually, even by their gifts and their nobleness. Another immortal, a true genius, might — nay, would — have asserted himself, and wrung a poem of almost the ancient force from the infirm instrument. It is easy to fancy, and to wish that it had been so — that some martyr or bishop, when bishops were martyrs, and the earth was still warm with the Sacrificial blood, had been called to the utterance of his soul's devotion, with the emphasis of a great poet's power. No one, however, was so called. Of all the names which shall presently be reckoned, and of which it is the object of this sketch to give some account, beseeching its readers to hold several in honorable remembrance, not one can be crowned with a steady hand as a true complete poet's name. Such a crown is a sacred dignity, and, as it should not be touched idly, it must not be used here. A born Warwick could find, here, no head for a crown.

Yet we shall reckon names 'for remembrance,' and speak of things not ignoble — of meek heroic Christians, and heavenward faces washed serene by tears — strong knees bending humbly for the very strength's sake — bright intellects burning often to the winds in fantastic shapes, but oftener still with an honest inward heat, vehement on heart and brain — most eloquent fallible lips that convince us less than they persuade — a divine loquacity of human falsities — poetical souls, that are not souls of poets! Surely not ignoble things! And the reader will perceive at once that the writer's heart is not laid beneath the wheels of a cumbrous ecclesiastical antiquity — that its intent is to love what is lovable, to honor what is honorable, and to kiss both through the dust of centuries, but by no means to recognize a *hierarchy*, whether in the church or in literature.

If, indeed, an opinion on the former relation might be regarded here, it would be well to suggest, that to these 'Fathers,' as we call them filially, with heads turned away, we owe more reverence for the grayness of their beards than theological gratitude for the outstretching of their hands. Devoted and disinterested as many among them were, they, themselves, were at most times evidently and consciously surer of their *love*, in a theologic sense, than of their knowledge in any. It is no place for a reference to religious controversy; and if it were, we are about to consider them simply as poets, without trenching on the very wide ground of their prose works and ecclesiastical opinions. Still one passing remark may be admissible, since the fact *is* so remarkable — how any body of Christian men can profess to derive their opinions from 'the opinions of the Fathers,' when *all* bodies might do so equally. These fatherly opinions are, in truth, multiform, and multitudinous as the fatherly 'sublime gray hairs.' There is not only a father apiece for every child, but, not to speak it unfilially, a piece of every father for every child. Justin Martyr would, of himself, set up a wilderness of sects, besides 'something over' for the future ramifications of each several one. What then should be done with our 'Fathers'? Leave them to perish by the time-Ganges, as old men innocent and decrepit, and worthy of no use or honor? Surely not. We may learn of them, if God will let us, *love*, and love is much — we may learn devotedness of them and warm our hearts by theirs; and this, although we rather distrust them as commentators, and utterly refuse them the reverence of our souls, in the capacity of theological oracles.

Their place in literature, which we have to do with to-day, may be found, perhaps, by a like moderation. That place is not, it has been admitted, of the highest; and that it is not of the lowest the proof will presently be attempted. There is a mid-air kingdom of the birds called Nephelococcygia, of which Aristophanes tells us something; and we might stand there a moment so as to measure the local adaptitude, putting up the Promethean umbrella to hide us from the 'Gods,' if it were not for the 'men and columns' lower down. But as it is, the very suggestion, if persisted in, would sink all the ecclesiastical antiquity it is desirable to find favor for, to all eternity, in the estimation of the kindest reader. No! the mid-air kingdom of the birds will not serve the wished-for purpose even illustratively, and by grace of the nightingale. 'May the sweet saints pardon us' for wronging them by an approach to such a sense, which, if attained and determined, would have consigned them so certainly to what St. Augustine called — when *he* was moderate too — *mitissima damnatio*, a very mild species of damnation.

It would be, in fact, a rank injustice to the beauty we are here to recognize, to place these writers in the rank of mediocrities, supposing the harsh sense. They may be called mediocrities as poets among poets, but not so as no poets at all. Some of them may sing before gods and men, and in front of any column, from Trajan's to that projected one in Trafalgar Square, to which is promised the miraculous distinction of making the National Gallery sink lower than we see it now. They may, as a body, sing exultingly, holding the relation of column to gallery, in front of the whole 'corpus' of Latin ecclesiastical poetry, and claim the world's ear and the poet's palm. That the modern Latin poets have been more read by scholars, and are better known by reputation to the general reader, is unhappily true: but the truth involves no good reason why it should be so, nor much marvel that it is so. Besides the greater accessibility of Latin literature, the vicissitude of life is extended to posthumous fame, and Time, who is Justice to the poet, is sometimes too busy in pulverizing bones to give the due weight to memories. The modern Latin poets, 'elegant,' — which is the critic's word to spend upon them, — elegant as they are occasionally, polished and accurate as they are comparatively, stand cold and lifeless, with statue-eyes, near these good, fervid, faulty Greeks of ours — and we do not care to look again. Our Greeks do, in their degree, claim their ancestral advantage, not the mere advantage of language, — nay, least the advantage of language — a comparative elegance and accuracy of expression being ceded to the Latins — but that higher distinction inherent in brain and breast, of vivid thought and quick sensibility. What if we swamp for a moment the Tertullians and Prudentiuses, and touch, by a permitted anachronism, with one hand VIDA, with the other GREGORY NAZIANZEN, what then? What though the Italian poet be smooth as the Italian Canova — working like him out of stone — smooth and cold, disdaining to ruffle his dactyls with the beating of his pulses — what then? Would we change for him our sensitive Gregory, with all his defects in the glorious 'scientia metrica'? We would not — perhaps we should not, even if those defects were not attributable, as Mr. Boyd, in the preface to his work on the Fathers, most justly intimates, to the changes incident to a declining language.

It is, too, as religious poets that we are called upon to estimate these neglected Greeks — as religious poets, of whom the universal church and the world's literature would gladly embrace more names than can be counted to either. For it is strange that, although Wilhelm Meister's uplooking and downlooking aspects, the reverence to things above and things below, the religious all-clasping spirit, be, and must be, in degree and measure, the grand necessity of every true poet's soul, — of religious poets, strictly so called, the earth is very bare. Religious 'parcel-poets' we have, indeed, more than enough; writers of hymns, translators of scripture into prose, or of prose generally into rhymes, of whose heart-devotion a higher faculty were worthy. Also there have been poets, not a few, singing as if earth were still Eden; and poets, many, singing as if in the first hour of exile, when the echo of the curse was louder than the whisper of the promise. But the right 'genius of Christianism' has done little up to this moment, even for Chateaubriand. We want the touch of Christ's hand upon our literature, as it touched other dead things — we want the sense of the saturation of Christ's blood upon the souls of our poets, that it may cry *through* them in answer to the ceaseless wail of the Sphinx of our humanity, expounding agony into renovation. Something of this has been perceived in art when its glory was at the fullest. Something of a yearning after this may be seen among the Greek Christian poets, something which would have been *much* with a stronger faculty. It will not harm us in any case, as lovers of literature and honest judges, if we breathe away, or peradventure *besom* away, the thick dust which lies upon their heavy folios, and besom away, or peradventure *breathe* away, the inward intellectual dust, which must be confessed to lie thickly, too, upon the heavy poems, and make our way softly and meekly into the heart of such hidden beauties (hidden and scattered) as our good luck, or good patience, or, to speak more reverently, the intrinsic goodness of the Fathers of Christian Poetry, shall permit us to discover. May gentle readers favor the endeavor, with 'gentle airs,' if any! readers not too proud to sleep, were it only for Homer's sake; nor too passionate, at their worst displeasure, to do worse than growl in their sleeves, after the manner of 'most delicate monsters.' It is not intended to crush this forbearing class with folios nor even with a folio; only to set down briefly in their sight what shall appear to the writer the characteristics of each poet, and to illustrate the opinion by the translation of a few detached passages, or, in certain possible cases, of short entire poems. And so much has been premised, simply that too much be not expected.

It has the look of an incongruity, to begin an account of the Greek Christian poets with a Jew; and EZEKIEL is a Jew in his very name, and a 'poet of the Jews' by profession. Moreover he is wrapt in such a mystery of chronology, that nobody can be quite sure of his not having lived before the Christian era — and one whole whisper establishes him as a unit of the famous seventy or seventy-two, under Ptolemy Philadelphus. Let us waive the chronology in favor of the mystery. He is brought out into light by Clemens Alexandrinus; and being associated with Greek poets, and a writer himself of Greek verses, we may receive him in virtue of the τοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτοτιγξ, with little fear, in his case, of implying an injustice in that middle bird-locality of Nephelococcygia. The reader must beware of confounding him with the prophet; and the circumstance of the latter's inspiration is sufficiently distinguishing. Our Greek Ezekiel is, indeed, whatever his chronology may be, no *vates* in the ancient sense. A Greek tragedy (and some fragments of a tragedy are all that we hold of him), by a Jew, and on a Jewish subject, 'The Exodus from Egypt,' may startle the most serene of us into curiosity — with which curiosity begins and ends the only strong feeling we can bring to bear upon the work; since, if the execution of it is somewhat curious too, there is a gentle collateral dulness which effectually secures us from feverish excitement. Moses prologizes after the worst manner of Euripides (worse than the worse), compendiously relating his adventures among the bulrushes and in Pharaoh's household, concluded by his slaying an Egyptian, *because nobody was looking.* So saith the poet. Then follows an interview between the Israelite and Zipporah, and her companions, wherein he puts to her certain geographical questions, and she (as far as we can make out through fragmentary cracks) rather *brusquely* proposes their mutual marriage; on which subject he does not venture an opinion; but we find him next confiding his dreams in a family fashion to her father, who considers them satisfactory. Here occurs a broad crack down the tragedy — and we are suddenly called to the revelation from the bush by an extraordinarily ordinary dialogue, between Deity and Moses. It is a surprising specimen of the kind of composition adverted to some lines ago, as the translation of Scripture into prose; and the sublime simplicity of the scriptural narrative being thus done (away) into Greek for a certain time, the following reciprocation — to which our old moralities can scarcely do more, or less, than furnish a parallel — prays for an English — exposure. The Divine Being is supposed to address Moses: —

But what is this thou holdest in thine hand? —
Let thy reply be sudden.
Moses. 'T is my rod —
I chasten with it quadrupeds and men.
Voice from the Bush. Cast it upon the ground — and straight recoil;
For it shall be, to move thy wonderment,
A terrible serpent.
Moses. It is cast. But THOU,
Be gracious to me, Lord. How terrible!
How monstrous! Oh, be pitiful to me!
I shudder to behold it, my limbs shake.

The reader is already consoled for the destiny which mutilated the tragedy, without requiring the last words of the analysis. Happily characteristic of the 'meekest of men' is Moses's naïve admission of the uses of his rod — to beat men and animals withal — of course 'when nobody is looking.'

CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, to whom we owe whatever gratitude is due for our fragmentary Ezekiel, was originally an Athenian philosopher, afterwards a converted Christian, a Presbyter of the Church at Alexandria, and preceptor of the famous Origen. Clemens flourished at the close of the second century. As a prose writer — and we have no prose writings of his, except such as were produced subsequently to his conversion — he is learned and various. His 'Pedagogue' is a wanderer, to universal intents and purposes; and his 'Tapestry,' if the 'Stromata' may be called so, is embroidered in all cross-stitches of philosophy, with not much scruple as to the shading of colors. In the midst of all is something, ycleped a dithyrambic ode, addressed to the Saviour, composite of fantastic epithets in the mode of the old litanies, and almost as bald of merit as the Jew-Greek drama, though Clemens himself (worthier in worthier places) be the poet. Here is the opening, which is less fanciful than what follows it: —

Curb for wild horses,
Wing for bird-courses
Never yet flown!
Helm, safe for weak ones,
Shepherd, bespeak once,
The young lambs thine own.
Rouse up the youth,
Shepherd and feeder,
So let them bless thee,
Praise and confess thee, —
Pure words on pure mouth, —
Christ, the child-leader!
O, the saints' Lord,
All-dominant word!
Holding, by Christdom,
God's highest wisdom!
Column in place
When sorrows seize us, —
Endless in grace
Unto man's race,
Saving one, Jesus!
Pastor and ploughman,
Helm, curb, together, —
Pinion that now can
(Heavenly of feather)
Raise and release us, —
Fisher who catcheth
Those whom he watcheth . . .

It goes on; but we need not do so. 'By the pricking of our thumbs,' we know that the reader has had enough of it.

Passing rapidly into the fourth century, we would offer our earliest homage to Gregory Nazianzen,

That name must ever be to us a friend,

when the two APOLINARII cross our path and intercept the 'all hail.' Apolinarius the grammarian, formerly of Alexandria, held the office of presbyter in the church of Laodicæa, and his son Apolinarius, an accomplished rhetorician, that of *reader*, an ancient ecclesiastical office, in the same church. This younger Apolinarius was a man of indomitable energies and most practical inferences; and when the edict of Julian forbade to the Christians the study of Grecian letters, he, assisted perhaps by his father's hope and hand, stood strong in the gap, not in the attitude of supplication, not with the gesture of consolation, but in power and sufficiency to fill up the void and baffle the tyrant. Both father and son were in the work, by some testimony; the younger Apolinarius standing out, by all, as the chief worker, and only one in any extensive sense. 'Does Julian deny us Homer?' said the brave man in his armed soul — 'I am Homer!' and straightway he turned the whole Biblical history, down to Saul's accession, into Homeric hexameters, — dividing the work, so as to clench the identity of first and second Homers, into twenty-four books, each superscribed by a letter of the alphabet, and the whole acceptable, according to the expression of Sozomen, ἀντὶ τῆς Ὁμήρου ποιήσεως, in the place of Homer's poetry. 'Does Julian deny us Euripides?' said Apolinarius again — 'I am Euripides!' and up he sprang, — as good an Euripides (who can doubt it?) as he ever was a Homer. 'Does Julian forbid us Menander? — Pindar? — Plato? — I am Menander! — I am Pindar! — I am Plato!' And comedies, lyrics, philosophics, flowed fast at the word; and the gospels and epistles adapted themselves naturally to the rules of Socratic disputation. A brave man, forsooth, was our Apolinarius of Laodicæa, and literally a man of men — for observe, says Sozomen, with a venerable innocence, at which the gravest may smile gravely, — as at a doublet worn awry at the Council of Nice, — that the old authors did each man his own work, whereas this Apolinarius did every man's work in addition to his own — and so admirably — intimates the ecclesiastical critic, — that if it were not for the common prejudice in favor of antiquity, no ancient could be missed in the all-comprehensive representativeness of the Laodicæan writer. So excellent was his ability, to 'outbrave the stars in several kinds of light,' besides the Cæsar! Whether Julian, naturally mortified to witness this germination of illustrious heads under the very iron of his searing, vowed vengeance against the Hydra-spirit, by the sacred memory of the animation of his own beard, we do not exactly know. To embitter the wrong, Apolinarius sent him a treatise upon truth — a confutation of the pagan doctrine, apart from the scriptural argument, — the Emperor's notice of which is both worthy of his Cæsarship, and a good model-notice for all sorts of critical dignities. *’Ανέγνων ἔγνων κατέγνων*, is the Greek of it; so that, turning from the letter to catch something of the point, we may write it down — 'I have perused, I have mused, I have abused:' which provoked as imperious a retort — 'Thou mayest have perused, but thou hast not mused; for hadst thou mused, thou wouldst not have abused.' Brave Laodicæan!

Apolinarius's laudable *double* of Greek literature has perished, the reader will be concerned to hear, from the face of the earth, being, like other *lusus*, or marvels, or monsters, brief of days. One only tragedy remains, with which the memory of Gregory Nazianzen has been right tragically affronted, and which Gregory, — *εἴ τις αἴσθησις*, as he said of Constantine, — would cast off with the scorn and anger befitting an Apolinarian heresy. For Apolinarius, besides being an epoist, dramatist, lyrist, philosopher, and rhetorician, was, we are sorry to add, in the eternal bustle of his soul, a heretic, — possibly for the advantage of something additional to do. He not only intruded into the churches hymns which were not authorized, being his own composition — so that reverend brows grew dark to hear women with musical voices sing them softly to the turning of their distaff, — but he fell into the heresy of denying a human soul to the perfect MAN, and of leaving the Divinity in bare combination with the Adamic dust. No wonder that a head so beset with many thoughts and individualities should at last turn round! — that eyes rolling in fifty fine frenzies of twenty-five fine poets should at last turn blind! — that a determination to rival all geniuses should be followed by a disposition more baleful in its exercise, to understand 'all mysteries'! Nothing can be plainer than the step after step, whereby, through excess of vain-glory and morbid mental activity, Apolinarius, the vice-poet of Greece, subsided into Apolinarius the chief heretic of Christendom.

To go back sighingly to the tragedy, where we shall have to sigh again — the only tragedy left to us of all the tragic works of Apolinarius (but we do not sigh for *that*!) — let no voice ever more attribute it to Gregory Nazianzen. How could Mr. Alford do so, however hesitatingly, in his 'Chapters,' attaching to it, without the hesitation, a charge upon the writer, whether Gregory or another man, that *he*, whoever he was, had, of his own free will and choice, destroyed the old Greek originals out of which his tragedy was constructed, and left it a monument of their sacrifice as of the blood on his barbarian hand? The charge passes, not only before a breath, but before its own breath. The tragedy is, in fact, a specimen of *centoism*, which is the adaptation of the phraseology of one work to the construction of another; and we have only to glance at it to perceive the Medæa of Euripides dislocated into the CHRISTUS PATIENS. Instead of the ancient opening —

> Oh, would ship Argo had not sailed away
> To Colchos by the rough Symplegades!
> Nor ever had been felled in Pelion's grove
> The pine, hewn for her side! . . .
> So she my queen,
> Medæa, had not touched this fatal shore,
> Soul-struck by love of Jason!

Apolinarius opens it thus —

> Oh, would the serpent had not glode along
> To Eden's garden-land, — nor ever had
> The crafty dragon planted in that grove
> A slimy snare! So she, rib-born of man,
> The wretched misled mother of our race,
> Had dared not to dare on beyond worst daring,
> Soul-struck by love of — apples!

'Let us alone for keeping our countenance' — and at any rate we are bound to ask gravely of Mr. Alford, *is the Medæa destroyed?* — and if not, did the author of the 'Christus Patiens' destroy his originals? and if not, may we not say of Mr. Alford's charge against that author, 'Oh, would he had not made it!' So far from Apolinarius being guilty of destroying his originals, it was his reverence for them which struggled with the edict of the persecutor, and accomplished this dramatic adventure; — and this adventure, the only remaining specimen of his adventurousness, may help us to the secret of his wonderful fertility and omni-representativeness, which is probably this — that the great majority of his works, tragic, comic, lyric, and philosophic, consisted simply of *centos*. Yet we pray for justice to Apolinarius: we pray for honor to his motives and energies. Without pausing to inquire whether it had been better and wiser to let poetry and literature depart at once before the tyranny of the edict, than to drag them back by the hair into attitudes grotesquely ridiculous — better and wiser for the Greek Christian schools to let them forgo altogether the poems of their Euripides, than adapt to the meek sorrows of the tender Virgin-mother, the bold, bad, cruel frenzy of Medæa, in such verses as these —

> She howls out ancient oaths, invokes the faith
> Of pledged right-hands, and calls, for witness, God!

— we pray straightforwardly for justice and honor to the motives and energies of Apolinarius. 'Oh, would that' many lived *now* as appreciative of the influences of poetry on our schools and country, as impatient of their contraction, as self-devoted in the great work of extending them! There remains of his poetical labors, besides the tragedy, a translation of David's Psalms into 'heroic verse,' which the writer of these remarks has not seen, — and of which those critics who desire to deal gently with Apolinarius seem to begin their indulgence by doubting the authenticity.

It is pleasant to turn shortly round, and find ourselves face to face, not with the author of 'Christus Patiens,' but with one antagonistical both to his poetry and his heresy, GREGORY NAZIANZEN. A noble and tender man was this Gregory, and so tender, because so noble; a man to lose no cubit of his stature for being looked at steadfastly, or struck at reproachfully. 'You may cast me down,' he said, 'from my bishop's throne, but you cannot banish me from before God's.' And bishop as he was, his saintly crown stood higher than his tiara, and his loving martyr-smile, the crown of a nature more benign than his fortune, shone up toward both. Son of the bishop of Nazianzen, and holder of the diocese which was his birthplace, previous to his elevation to the level of the storm in the bishopric of Constantinople, little did he care for bishoprics or high places of any kind, — the desire of his soul being for solitude, quietude, and that silent religion which should 'rather be than seem.' But his father's head bent whitely before him, even in the chamber of his brother's death, — and Basil, his beloved friend, the 'half of his soul,' pressed on him with the weight of love; and Gregory, feeling their tears upon his cheeks, did not count his own, but took up the priestly office. Poor Gregory! not merely as a priest, but as a man, he had a sighing life of it. His student days at Athens, where he and Basil read together poems and philosophies, and holier things, or talked low and *misopogonistically* of their fellow-student Julian's bearded boding smile, were his happiest days. He says of himself,

> As many stones
> Were thrown at *me*, as other men had flowers.

Nor was persecution the worst evil; for friend after friend, beloved after beloved, passed away from before his face, and the voice which charmed them living spoke brokenly beside their graves, — his funeral orations marked severally the wounds of his heart, — and his genius served, as genius often does, to lay an emphasis on his grief. The passage we shall venture to translate is rather a cry than a song —

> Where are my wingèd words? Dissolved in air.
> Where is my flower of youth? All withered. Where
> My glory? Vanished. Where the strength I knew
> From comely limbs? Disease hath changed it too,
> And bent them. Where the riches and the lands?
> GOD HATH THEM! Yea, and sinners' snatching hands
> Have grudged the rest. Where is my father, mother,
> And where my blessed sister, my sweet brother?
> Gone to the grave! — There did remain for me
> Alone my fatherland, till destiny,
> Malignly stirring a black tempest, drove
> My foot from that last rest. And now I rove
> Estranged and desolate a foreign shore,
> And drag my mournful life and age all hoar
> Throneless and cityless, and childless save
> This father-care for children, which I have,
> Living from day to day on wandering feet.
> Where shall I cast this body? What will greet
> My sorrows with an end? What gentle ground
> And hospitable grave will wrap me round?
> Who last my dying eyelids stoop to close —
> Some saint, the Saviour's friend? or one of those
> Who do not know Him? The air interpose,
> And scatter these words too.

The return upon the first thought is highly pathetic; and there is a restlessness of anguish about the whole passage which consecrates it with the cross of nature. His happy Athenian associations gave a color, unwashed out by tears, to his mind and works. Half apostolical he was, and half scholastical; and while he mused, on his bishop's throne, upon the mystic tree of twelve fruits, and the shining of the river of life, he carried, as Milton did, with a gentle and not ungraceful distraction, both hands full of green trailing branches from the banks of the Cephissus, nay, from the very plane-tree which Socrates sat under with Phædrus, when they two talked about beauty to the rising and falling of its leaves. As an orator, he was greater, all must feel if some do not think, than his contemporaries; and the 'golden mouth' might confess it meekly. Erasmus compares him to Isocrates, but the unlikeness is obvious: Gregory was not excellent at an artful blowing of the pipes. He spoke grandly, as the wind does, in gusts; and, as in a mighty wind, which combines unequal noises, the creaking of trees and rude swinging of doors as well as the sublime sovereign rush along the valleys, we gather the idea, from his eloquence, less of music than of power. Not that he is cold as the wind is — the metaphor goes no further: Gregory cannot be cold, even by disfavor of his antithetic points. He is various in his oratory, full and rapid in allusion, briefly graphic in metaphor, equally sufficient for indignation or pathos, and gifted peradventure with a keener dagger of sarcasm than should hang in a saint's girdle. His orations against Julian have all these characteristics, but they are not poetry, and we must pass down lower, and quite over his beautiful letters, to Gregory the poet.

He wrote *thirty thousand verses*, among the which are several long poems, severally defective in a defect common but not necessary to short occasional poems, and lamentable anywhere, a want of unity and completeness. The excellences of his prose are transcribed, with whatever faintness, in his poetry — the exaltation, the devotion, the sweetness, the pathos, even to the playing of satirical power about the graver meanings. But although noble thoughts break up the dulness of the groundwork, —although, with the instinct of greater poets, he bares his heart in his poetry, and the heart is worth baring, still monotony of construction without unity of intention is the most wearisome of monotonies, and, except in the case of a few short poems, we find it everywhere in Gregory. The lack of variety is extended to the cadences, and the pauses fall stiffly 'come corpo morto cade.' Melodious lines we have often: harmonious passages scarcely ever — the music turning heavily on its own axle, as inadequate to living evolution. The poem on his own life ('De Vitâ suâ') is, in many places, interesting and affecting, yet faulty with all these faults. The poem on Celibacy, which state is commended by Gregory as becometh a bishop, has occasionally graphic touches, but is dull enough generally to suit the fairest spinster's view of that melancholy subject. If Hercules could have read it, he must have rested in the middle — from which the reader is entreated to forbear the inference that the poem has not been read through by the writer of the present remarks, seeing that that writer marked the grand concluding moment with a white stone, and laid up the memory of it among the chief triumphs, to say nothing of the fortunate deliverances, *vitæ suæ*. In Gregory's elegiac poems, our ears, at least, are better contented, because the sequence of pentameter to hexameter necessarily excludes the various cadence which they yearn for under other circumstances. His anacreontics are sometimes nobly written, with a certain brave recklessness, as if the thoughts despised the measure — and we select from this class a specimen of his poetry, both because three of his hymns have already appeared in the 'Athenæum,' and because the anacreontic in question includes to a remarkable extent the various qualities we have attributed to Gregory, not omitting that play of satirical humor with which he delights to ripple the abundant flow of his thoughts. The writer, though also a translator, feels less misgiving than usual in offering to the reader, in such English as is possible, this spirited and beautiful poem.

SOUL AND BODY

WHAT wilt thou possess or be?
O my soul, I ask of thee.
What of great, or what of small,
Counted precious therewithal?
Be it only rare, and want it,
I am ready, soul, to grant it.
Wilt thou choose to have and hold
Lydian Gyges' charm of old,
So to rule us with a ring,
Turning round the jewelled thing,
Hidden by its face concealed,
And revealed by its revealed?
Or preferrest Midas' fate —
He who died in golden state,
All things being changed to gold?
Of a golden hunger dying,
Through a surfeit of 'would I'-ing!
Wilt have jewels brightly cold,
Or may fertile acres please?
Or the sheep of many a fold,
Camels, oxen, for the wold?
Nay! I will not give thee these!
These to take thou hast not will,
These to give I have not skill;
Since I cast earth's cares abroad,
That day when I turned to God.

Wouldst a throne, a crown sublime,
Bubble blown upon the time?
So thou mayest sit to-morrow
Looking downward in meek sorrow,
Some one walking by thee scorning
Who adored thee yester morning,
Some malign one? Wilt be bound
Fast in marriage (joy unsound!)
And be turnèd round and round
As the time turns? Wilt thou catch it,
That sweet sickness? and to match it
Have babies by the hearth, bewildering?
And if I tell thee the best children
Are none — what answer?
Wilt thou thunder
Thy rhetorics, move the people under?
Covetest to sell the laws
With no justice in thy cause,
And bear on, or else be borne,
Before tribunals worthy scorn?
Wilt thou shake a javelin rather
Breathing war? or wilt thou gather
Garlands from the wrestler's ring?
Or kill beasts for glorying?
Covetest the city's shout,
And to be in brass struck out?
Cravest thou that shade of dreaming,
Passing air of shifting seeming,
Rushing of a printless arrow,
Clapping echo of a hand?
What to those who understand
Are to-day's enjoyments narrow
Which to-morrow go again,
Which are shared with evil men
And of which no man in his dying
Taketh aught for softer lying?
What then wouldst thou, if thy mood
Choose not these? what wilt thou be
O my soul — a deity?
A God before the face of God,
Standing glorious in His glories,
Choral in His angels' chorus?

Go! upon thy wing arise,
Plumèd by quick energies,
Mount in circles up the skies:
And I will bless thy wingèd passion,
Help with words thine exaltation,
And, like a bird of rapid feather,
Outlaunch thee, Soul, upon the æther.

But thou, O fleshly nature, say,
Thou with odors from the clay,
Since thy presence I must have
As a lady with a slave,
What wouldst thou possess or be,
That thy breath may stay with thee?
Nay! I owe thee nought beside,
Though thine hands be open wide.

Would a table suit thy wishes,
Fragrant with sweet oils and dishes
Wrought to subtle niceness? where
Stringèd music strokes the air,
And blithe hand-clappings, and the smooth
Fine postures of the tender youth
And virgins wheeling through the dance
With an unveiled countenance, —
Joys for drinkers, who love shame,
And the maddening wine-cup's flame.
Wilt thou such, howe'er decried?
Take them, — and a rope beside!

Nay! this boon I give instead
Unto friend insatiated, —
May some rocky house receive thee,
Self-roofed, to conceal thee chiefly;
Or if labor there must lurk,
Be it by a short day's work!
And for garment, camel's hair,
As the righteous clothèd were,
Clothe thee! or the bestial skin
Adam's bareness hid within, —
Or some green thing from the way,
  Leaf of herb, or branch of vine,
Swelling, purpling as it may,
  Fearless to be drunk for wine!
Spread a table there beneath thee,
Which a sweetness shall upbreathe thee,
And which the dearest earth is giving,
Simple present to all living!
When that we have placed thee near it,
We will feed thee with glad spirit.
Wilt thou eat? soft, take the bread,
Oaten cake, if that bested;
Salt will season all aright,
And thine own good appetite,
Which we measure not, nor fetter·
'T is an uncooked condiment,
Famine's self the only better.
  Wilt thou drink? why, here doth bubble
Water from a cup unspent,
  Followed by no tipsy trouble,
Pleasure sacred from the grape!
Wilt thou have it in some shape
More like luxury? we are
No grudgers of wine-vinegar!
But if all will not suffice thee,
  And thou covetest to draw
  In that pitcher with a flaw,
Brimful pleasures heaven denies thee —
Go, and seek out, by that sign,
Other help than this of mine!
For me, I have not leisure so
To warm thee, Sweet, my household foe,
Until, like a serpent frozen,
New maddened with the heat, thou loosen
  Thy rescued fang within mine heart!
Wilt have measureless delights
Of gold-roofed palaces, and sights
  From pictured or from sculptured art,
With motion near their life; and splendor
Of bas-relief, with tracery tender,
And varied and contrasted hues?
Wilt thou have, as nobles use,
Broidered robes to flow about thee?
Jewelled fingers? Need we doubt thee?
Gauds for which the wise will flout thee?
I most, who, of all beauty, know
It must be inward, to be so!
And thus I speak to mortals low,
Living for the hour, and o'er
Its shadow, seeing nothing more;
But for those of nobler bearing,
Who live more worthily of wearing
A portion of the heavenly nature —
To low estate of clayey creature,
See, I bring the beggar's meed,
Nutriment beyond the need!
O, beholder of the Lord,
Prove on me the flaming sword!
Be mine husbandman, to nourish
Holy plants, that words may flourish
Of which mine enemy would spoil me,
Using pleasurehood to foil me!
Lead me closer to the tree
Of all life's eternity;
Which, as I have pondered, is
The knowledge of God's greatnesses:
Light of One, and shine of Three,
Unto whom all things that be
Flow and tend!
                    In such a guise,
Whoever on the earth is wise
Will speak unto himself: and who
Such inner converse would eschew, —
We say perforce of that poor wight,
'He lived in vain!' and if *aright*,
It is not the worst word we might.

Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium, was beloved and much appreciated by Gregory, and often mentioned in his writings. Few of the works of Amphilochius are extant, and of these only one is a poem. It is a didactic epistle to Seleucus, 'On the Right Direction of his Studies and Life,' and has been attributed to Gregory Nazianzen by some writers, upon very inadequate evidence, — that adduced (the similar phraseology which conveys, in this poem and a poem of Gregory's, the catalogue of canonical scriptures), being as easily explained by the imitation of one poet, as by the identity of two. They differ, moreover, upon ground more important than phraseology: Amphilochius appearing to reject, or at least to receive doubtfully, Jude's epistle, and the Second of Peter. And there is a harsh force in the whole poem, which does not remind us of our Nazianzen, while it becomes, in the course of dissuading Seleucus from the amusements of the amphitheatre, graphic and effective. We hear, through the description, the grinding of the tigers' teeth, the sympathy of the people with the tigers showing still more savage.

They sit unknowing of these agonies,
Spectators at a show. When a man flies
From a beast's jaw, they groan, as if at least
They missed the ravenous pleasure, like the beast,
And sat there vainly. When, in the next spring,
The victim is attained, and, uttering
The deep roar or quick shriek between the fangs,
Beats on the dust the passion of his pangs,
All pity dieth in that glaring look.
They clap to see the blood run like a brook;
They stare with hungry eyes, which tears should fill,
And cheer the beasts on with their soul's good will;
And wish more victims to their maw, and urge
And lash their fury, as they shared the surge,
Gnashing their teeth, like beasts, on flesh of men.

There is an appalling reality in this picture. The epistle consists of 333 lines, which we mention specifically, because the poet takes advantage of the circumstance to illustrate or enforce an important theological doctrine: —

Three hundred lines, three decads, monads three,
Comprise my poem. *Love the Trinity.*

It would be almost a pain, and quite a regret, to pass from this fourth century without speaking a word which belongs to it — a word which rises to our lips, a word worthy of honor — HELIODORUS. Though a bishop and an imaginative writer, his 'Æthiopica' has no claim on our attention, either by right of Christianity or poetry; and yet we may be pardoned on our part for love's sake, and on account of the false position into which, by negligence of readers or insufficiency of translators, his beautiful romance has fallen, if we praise it heartily and faithfully even here. Our tears praised it long ago, our recollection does so now, and its own pathetic eloquence and picturesque descriptiveness are ripe for any praise. It has, besides, a vivid Arabian Night charm, almost as charming as Scheherazade herself, suggestive of an Arabian Night story drawn out 'in many a winding bout,' and not merely on the ground of extemporaneous loving and methodical (must we say it?) *lying*. In good sooth — no, not in good sooth, but in evil leasing — every hero and heroine of them all, from Abou Hassan to 'the divine Chariclæa,' does lie most vehemently and abundantly by gift of nature and choice of author, whether bishop or sultana. 'It is,' as Pepys observes philosophically of the comparative destruction of gin-shops and churches in the Great Fire of London, 'pretty to observe' how they all lie. And although the dearest of story-tellers, our own Chaucer, has told us that 'some leasing is, of which there cometh none advauntage to no wight,' even that species is used by them magnanimously in its turn, for the bare glory's sake, and without caring for the 'advauntage.' With equal liberality, but more truth, we write down the bishop of Tricca's romance *charming*, and wish the charm of it (however we may be out of place in naming him among poets,) upon any poet who has not yet felt it, and whose eyes, giving honor, may wander over these Remarks. The poor bishop thought as well of his book as we do, perhaps better; for when commanded, under ecclesiastical censure, to burn it or give up his bishopric, he gave up the bishopric. And who blames Heliodorus? He thought well of his romance; he was angry with those who did not; he was weak with the love of it. Let whosoever blames, speak low. Romance-writers are not educated for martyrs, and the exacted martyrdom was very very hard. Think of that English bishop who burnt his hand by an act of volition — only his hand, and which was sure to be burnt afterwards; and how he was praised for it! Heliodorus had to do with a dearer thing — — handwriting, not hands. Authors will pardon him, if bishops do not.

NONNUS of Panopolis, the poet of the 'Dionysiaca,' a work of some twenty-two thousand verses, on some twenty-two thousand subjects shaken together, flourished, as people say of many a dry-rooted soul, at the commencement of the fifth century. He was converted from paganism, but we are sorry to make the melancholy addition, that he was never converted from the 'Dionysiaca.' The only Christian poem we owe to him — a paraphrase, in hexameters, of the apostle John's gospel — does all that a bald verbosity and an obscure tautology can do or undo, to quench the divinity of that divine narrative. The two well-known words, bearing on their brief vibration the whole passion of a world saved through pain from pain, are thus *traduced*: —

They answered him
'Come and behold.' *Then Jesus himself groaned,*
Dropping strange tears from eyes unused to weep.

'Unused to weep!' *Was* it so of the Man of Sorrows? Oh, obtuse poet! We had translated the opening passage of the Paraphrase, and laid it by for transcription, but are repelled. Enough is said. Nonnus was never converted from the 'Dionysiaca.'

SYNESIUS of Cyrene learnt Plato's philosophy so well of Hypatia of Alexandria at the commencement of the fifth century, or rather before, that, to the obvious honor of that fair and learned teacher, he never, as bishop of Ptolemais, could attain to unlearning it. He did not wish to be bishop of Ptolemais; he had divers objections to the throne and the domination. He loved his dogs, he loved his wife; he loved Hypatia and Plato as well as he loved truth; and he loved beyond all things, under the womanly instruction of the former, to have his own way. He was a poet, too; the chief poet, we do not hesitate to record our opinion, — the chief, for true and natural gifts, of all our Greek Christian poets; and it was his choice to pray lyrically between the dew and the cloud rather than preach dogmatically between the doxies. If Gregory shrank from the episcopal office through a meek self-distrust and a yearning for solitude, Synesius repulsed the invitation to it through an impatience of control over heart and life, and for the earnest joy's sake of thinking out his own thought in the hunting-grounds, with no deacon or disciple astuter than his dog to watch the thought in his face, and trace it backward or forward, as the case might be, into something more or less than what was orthodox. Therefore he, a man of many and wandering thoughts, refused the bishopric, — not weepingly, indeed, as Gregory did, nor feigning madness with another of the 'nolentes episcopari' of that earnest period, — but with a sturdy enunciation of resolve, more likely to be effectual, of keeping his wife by his side as long as he lived, and of doubting as long as he pleased to doubt upon the resurrection of the body. But Synesius was a man of genius, and of all such true energies as are taken for granted in the name; and the very sullenness of his 'nay' being expressive to grave judges of the faithfulness of his 'yea and amen,' he was considered too noble a man not to be made a bishop of in his own despite, and on his own terms. The fact proves the latitude of discipline, and even of doctrine, permitted to the churches of that age; and it does not appear that the church at Ptolemais suffered any wrong as its result, seeing that Synesius, recovering from the shock militant of his ordination, in the course of which his ecclesiastical friends had 'laid hands upon him' in the roughest sense of the word, performed his new duties willingly; was no sporting bishop otherwise than as a 'fisher of men' — sent his bow to the dogs, and his dogs to Jericho, that nearest Coventry to Ptolemais, silencing his 'staunch hound's authentic voice' as soon as ever any importance became attached to the authenticity of his own. And if, according to the bond, he retained his wife and his Platonisms, we may honor him by the inference, that he did so for conscience' sake still more than love's, since the love was inoperative in other matters. For spiritual fervor and exaltation, he has honor among men and angels; and however intent upon spiritualizing away the most glorified material body from 'the heaven of his invention,' he held fast and earnestly, as anybody's clenched hand could a horn of the altar, the Homoousion doctrine of the Christian heaven, and other chief doctrines emphasizing the divine sacrifice. But this poet has a higher place among poets than this bishop among bishops; the highest, we must repeat our conviction, of all yet named or to be named by us as 'Greek Christian poets.' Little, indeed, of his poetry has reached us, but this little is great in a nobler sense than of quantity; and when of his odes, Anacreontic for the most part, we cannot say praisefully that 'they smell of Anacreon,' it is because their fragrance is holier and more abiding; it is because the human soul burning in the censer effaces from our spiritual perceptions the attar of a thousand rose-trees whose roots are in Teos. These odes have, in fact, a wonderful rapture and ecstasy. And if we find in them the phraseology of Plato or Plotinus, for he leant lovingly to the later Platonists, — nay, if we find in them oblique references to the out-worn mythology of paganism, even so have we beheld the mixed multitude of unconnected motes wheeling, rising in a great sunshine, as the sunshine were a motive energy, — and even so the burning, adoring poet-spirit sweeps upward the motes of world-fancies (as if, being in the world, their tendency was Godward) upward in a strong stream of sunny light, while she rushes into the presence of 'the Alone.' We say the *spirit* significantly in speaking of this poet's aspiration. His is an ecstasy of abstract intellect, of pure spirit, cold though impetuous; the heart does not beat in it, nor is the human voice heard; the poet is true to the heresy of the ecclesiastic, and there is no resurrection of the body. We shall attempt a translation of the ninth ode, closer if less graceful and polished than Mr. Boyd's, helping our hand to courage by the persuasion that the genius of its poetry must look through the thickest blanket of our dark.

Well-beloved and glory-laden,
Born of Solyma's pure maiden!
I would hymn Thee, blessed Warden,
Driving from Thy Father's garden
Blinking serpent's crafty lust,
With his bruised head in the dust!
Down Thou camest, low as earth,
Bound to those of mortal birth;
Down Thou camest, low as hell,
Where shepherd-Death did tend and keep
A thousand nations like to sheep,
While weak with age old Hades fell
Shivering through his dark to view Thee,
And the Dog did backward yell
With jaws all gory to let through Thee!
So, redeeming from their pain
Choirs of disembodied ones,
Thou didst lead whom Thou didst gather,
Upward in ascent again,
With a great hymn to the Father,
Upward to the pure white thrones!
King, the dæmon tribes of air
Shuddered back to feel Thee there!
And the holy stars stood breathless,
Trembling in their chorus deathless;
A low laughter fillèd æther —
Harmony's most subtle sire
From the seven strings of his lyre
Stroked a measured music hither —
Io pæan! victory!
Smiled the star of morning — he
Who smileth to foreshow the day!
Smilèd Hesperus the golden,
Who smileth soft for Venus gay!
While that hornèd glory holden
Brimful from the fount of fire,
The white moon, was leading higher
In a gentle pastoral wise
All the nightly deities!
Yea, and Titan threw abroad
The far shining of his hair
'Neath Thy footsteps holy-fair,
Owning Thee the Son of God;
The Mind artificer of all,
And his own fire's original.

And THOU upon Thy wing of will
Mounting, — Thy God-foot uptill
The neck of the blue firmament, —
Soaring, didst alight content
Where the spirit-spheres were singing,
And the fount of good was springing,
In the silent heaven!
Where Time is not with his tide
Ever running, never weary,
Drawing earth-born things aside
Against the rocks: nor yet are given
The plagues death-bold that ride the dreary
Tost matter-depths. Eternity
Assumes the places which they yield!
Not aged, howsoe'er she held
Her crown from everlastingly —
At once of youth, at once of eld,
While in that mansion which is hers
To God and gods she ministers!

How the poet rises in his 'singing clothes,' embroidered all over with the mythos and the philosophy! Yet his eye is to the Throne: and we must not call him half a heathen by reason of a Platonic idiosyncrasy, seeing that the esoteric of the most suspicious turnings of his phraseology is 'Glory to the true God.' For another ode, Paris should be here to choose it — we are puzzled among the beautiful. Here is one with a thought in it from Gregory's prose, which belongs to Synesius by right of conquest: —

O my deathless, O my blessed,
Maid-born, glorious son confessed,

O my Christ of Solyma !
I who earliest learnt to play
This measure for Thee, fain would bring
Its new sweet tune to citern-string —
Be propitious, O my King !
Take this music which is mine
Anthem'd from the songs divine !

We will sing thee, deathless One,
God himself and God's great Son —
Of sire of endless generations,
Son of manifold creations !
Nature mutually endued,
Wisdom in infinitude !
God, before the angels burning —
Corpse, among the mortals mourning !
What time Thou wast pourèd mild
From an earthy vase defiled,
Magi with fair arts besprent,
At Thy new star's orient,
Trembled inly, wondered wild,
Questioned with their thoughts abroad —
'What then is the new-born child ?
Who the hidden God ?
God, or corpse, or king ?
Bring your gifts, oh hither bring
Myrrh for rite — for tribute, gold —
Frankincense for sacrifice !
God ! Thine incense take and hold !
King ! I bring thee gold of price !
Myrrh with tomb will harmonize !

For Thou, entombed, hast purified
Earthly ground and rolling tide,
And the path of dæmon nations,
And the free air's fluctuations,
And the depth below the deep !
Thou God, helper of the dead,
Low as Hades didst Thou tread !
Thou King, gracious aspect keep,
Take this music which is mine,
Anthem'd from the songs divine.

Eudocia — in the twenty-first year of the fifth century — wife of Theodosius, and empress of the world, thought good to extend her sceptre —

(Hac claritate gemina
O gloriosa fœmina !) —

over Homer's poems, and cento-ize them into an epic on the Saviour's life. She was the third fair woman accused of sacrificing the world for an apple, having moved her husband to wrath, by giving away his imperial gift of a large one to her own philosophic friend Paulinus ; and being unhappily more learned than her two predecessors in the sin, in the course of her exile to Jerusalem she took ghostly comfort by separating Homer's εἴδωλον from his φρένες. There she sat among the ruins of the holy city, addressing herself most unholily, with whatever good intentions and delicate fingers, to pulling Homer's gold to pieces bit by bit, even as the ladies of France devoted what remained to them of virtuous energy 'pour parfiler' under the benignant gaze of Louis Quinze. She, too, who had no right of the purple to literary ineptitude — she, born no empress of Rome, but daughter of Leontius the Athenian, what had she to do with Homer, 'parfilant'? Was it not enough for Homer that he was turned once, like her own cast imperial mantle, by Apolinarius into a Jewish epic, but that he must be unpicked again by Eudocia for a Christian epic ? The reader, who has heard enough of centos, will not care to hear how she did it. That she did it was too much ; and the deed recoiled. For mark the poetical justice of her destiny ; let all readers mark it, and all writers, especially female writers, who may be half as learned, and not half as fair, — that although she wrote many poems, one 'On the Persian War,' whose title and merit are recorded, not one, except this cento, has survived. The obliterative sponge, we hear of in Æschylus, has washed out every verse except this cento's 'damned spot.' This remains. This is called Eudocia : this stands for the daughter of Leontius, and this only in the world. O fair mischief ! she is punished by her hand.

And yet, are we born critics any more than she was born an empress, that we should not have a heart ? and is our heart stone, that it should not wax soft within us while the vision is stirred 'between our eyelids and our eyes,' of this beautiful Athenais, baptized once by Christian waters, and once by human tears, into Eudocia, the imperial mourner ? — this learned pupil of a learned father, crowned once by her golden hair, and once by her golden crown, yet praised more for poetry and learning than for beauty and greatness by such grave writers as Socrates and Evagrius, the ecclesiastical historians ? — this world's empress, pale with the purple of her palaces, an exile even on the throne from her Athens, and soon twice an exile, from father's grave and husband's bosom ? We relent before such a vision. And what if, relentingly, we declare her innocent of the Homeric cento ? — what if we find her 'a whipping boy' to take the blame ? — what if we write down a certain Proba 'improba,' and bid her bear it ? For Eudocia, having been once a mark to slander, may have been so again ; and Falconia Proba, having committed centoism upon Virgil, must have been capable of anything. The Homeric cento has been actually attributed to her by certain critics, with whom we would join in all earnestness our most sour voices, gladly, for Eudocia's sake, who is closely dear to us, and not malignly for Proba's, who was 'improba' without our help. So shall we impute evil to only one woman, and she not an Athenian ; while our worst wish, even to her, assumes this innoxious shape, that she had used a distaff rather than a stylus, though herself and the yet more 'Sleeping Beauty' had owned one horoscope between them ! Amen to our wish ! A busy distaff and a sound sleep to Proba !

And now, that golden-haired, golden-crowned daughter of Leontius, for whom neither the much learning nor the much sorrow drove Hesperus from her sovran eyes — let her pass on unblenched. Be it said of her, softly as she goes, by all gentle readers — 'She is innocent, whether for centos or for apples ! She wrote only such Christian Greek poems as Christians and poets might rejoice to read, but which perished with her beauty, as being of one seed with it.'

Midway in the sixth century we encounter Paul Silentiarius, called so in virtue of the office held by him in the court of Justinian, and chiefly esteemed for his descriptive poem on the Byzantine church of St. Sophia, which, after the Arian conflagration, was rebuilt gorgeously by the emperor. This church was not dedicated to a female saint, according to the supposition of many persons, but to the second person of the Trinity, the ἁγία σοφία — holy wisdom; while the poem being recited in the imperial presence, and the poet's gaze often forgetting to rise higher than the imperial smile, Paul Silentiarius dwelt less on the divine dedication and the spiritual uses of the place, than on the glory of the dedicator and the beauty of the structure. We hesitate, moreover, to grant to his poem the praise which has been freely granted to it by more capable critics, of its power to realize this beauty of structure to the eyes of the reader. It is highly elaborate and artistic; but the elaboration and art appear to us architectural far more than picturesque. There is no sequency, no congruity, no keeping, no light and shade. The description has reference to the working as well as to the work, to the materials as well as to the working. The eyes of the reader are suffered to approach the whole only in analysis, or rather in analysis analyzed. Every part, part by part, is recounted to him excellently well — is brought close till he may touch it with his eyelashes; but when he seeks for the general effect, it is in pieces — there is none of it. Byron shows him more in the passing words —

I have beheld Sophia's bright roofs swell
Their glittering mass i' the sun —

than Silentiarius in all his poem. Yet the poem has abundant merit in diction and harmony; and, besides higher noblenesses, the pauses are modulated with an artfulness not commonly attained by these later Greeks, and the ear exults in an unaccustomed rhythmetic pomp which the inward critical sense is inclined to murmur at, as an expletive verbosity.

Whoever looketh with a mortal eye
To heaven's emblazoned forms, not steadfastly
With unreverted neck can bear to measure
That meadow-round of star-apparelled pleasure,
But drops his eyelids to the verdant hill,
Yearning to see the river run at will,
With flowers on each side, — and the ripening corn,
And grove thick set with trees, and flocks at morn
Leaping against the dews, — and olives twined,
And green vine-branches, trailingly inclined, —
And the blue calmness skimmed by dripping oar
Along the Golden Horn.
                                        But if he bring
His foot across this threshold, never more
Would he withdraw it; fain, with wandering
Moist eyes, and ever-turning head, to stay,
Since all satiety is driven away
Beyond the noble structure. Such a fane
Of blameless beauty hath our Cæsar raised
By God's perfective grace, and not in vain!
O emperor, these labors we have praised,
Draw down the glorious Christ's perpetual smile;
For thou, the high-peaked Ossa didst not pile
Upon Olympus' head, nor Pelion throw
Upon the neck of Ossa, opening so
The æther to the steps of mortals! no!
Having achieved a work more high than hope,
Thou didst not need these mountains as a slope
Whereby to scale the heaven! Wings take thee thither
From purest piety to highest æther.

The following passage, from the same 'Description,' is hard to turn into English, through the accumulative riches of the epithets. Greek words atone for their vainglorious redundancy by their beauty, but we cannot think so of these our own pebbles: —

Who will unclose me Homer's sounding lips,
And sing the marble meed that oversweeps
The mighty walls and pavements spread around
Of this tall temple, which the sun has crowned?
The hammer with its iron tooth was loosed
Into Carystus' summit green, and bruised
The Phrygian shoulder of the dædal stone; —
This marble, colored after roses fused
In a white air, and that, with flowers thereon
Both purple and silver, shining tenderly!
And that which in the broad fair Nile sank low
The barges to their edge, the porphyry's glow
Sown thick with little stars! and thou mayst see
The green stone of Laconia glitter free!
And all the Carian hill's deep bosom brings,
Streaked bow-wise, with a livid white and red, —
And all the Lydian chasm keeps coverèd,
A hueless blossom with a ruddier one
Soft mingled! all, besides, the Libyan sun
Warms with his golden splendor, till he make
A golden yellow glory for his sake,
Along the roots of the Maurusian height;
And all the Celtic mountains give to sight
From crystal clefts: black marbles dappled fair
With milky distillations here and there!
And all the onyx yields in metal-shine
Of precious greenness! — all that land of thine,
Ætolia, hath on even plains engendered
But not on mountain-tops, — a marble rendered
Here nigh to green, of tints which emeralds use,
Here with a sombre purple in the hues!
Some marbles are like new-dropt snow, and some
Alight with blackness! Beauty's rays have come,
So congregate, beneath this holy dome!

And thus the poet takes us away from the church and dashes our senses and admirations down these marble quarries! Yet it is right for us to admit the miracle of a poem made out of stones! and when he spoke of unclosing Homer's lips on such a subject, he was probably thinking of Homer's ships, and meant to intimate that one catalogue was as good for him as another.

John Geometra arose in no propitious orient probably with the seventh century, although the time of his 'elevation' appears to be uncertain within a hundred years.

He riseth slowly, as his sullen car
Had all the weights of sleep and death hung on it.

Plato, refusing his divine fellowship to any one who was not a geometrician or who was a poet- might have kissed our Johannes, who was not divine, upon both cheeks, in virtue of his other name and in vice of his verses. He was the author of certain hymns to the Virgin Mary, as accumulative of epithets and admirations as ten of her litanies, inclusive of a pious compliment, which, however geometrically exact in its proportions, sounds strangely.

O health to thee ! new living car of the sky,
 Afire on the wheels of four virtues at once !
O health to thee ! Seat, than the cherubs more high,
 More pure than the seraphs, *more broad than the thrones !*

Towards the close of the last hymn, the exhausted poet empties back something of the ascription into his own lap, by a remarkable 'mihi quoque.'

O health to me, royal one ! if there belong
 Any grace to my singing, that grace is from thee.
O health to me, royal one ! if in my song
 Thou hast pleasure, oh, thine is the grace of the glee !

We may mark the time of George Pisida, about thirty years deep in the seventh century. He has been confounded with the rhetorical archbishop of Nicomedia, but held the office of scævophylax, only lower than the highest, in the metropolitan church of St. Sophia, and was a poet, singing half in the church and half in the court, and considerably nearer to the feet of the Emperor Heraclius than can please us in any measure. Hoping all things, however, in our poetical charity, we are willing to hope even this, — that the man whom Heraclius carried about with him as a singing-man when he went to fight the Persians, and who sang and recited accordingly, and provided notes of admiration for all the imperial notes of interrogation, and gave his admiring poems the appropriate and suggestive name of *acroases* — auscultations, things intended to be heard, — might nevertheless love Heraclius the fighting-man, not slave-wise or flatterer-wise, but man-wise or dog-wise, in good truth, and up to the brim of his praise ; and so hoping, we do not dash the praise down as a libation to the infernal task-masters. Still it is an impotent conclusion to a free-hearted poet's musing on the 'Six Days' Work,' to wish God's creation under the sceptre of his particular friend ! It looks as if the particular friend had an ear like Dionysius, and the poet — ah, the poet ! — a mark as of a chain upon his brow in the shadow of his court laurel.

We shall not revive the question agitated among his contemporaries, whether Euripides or George Pisida wrote the best iambics ; but that our George knew the secret of beauty, and that, having noble thoughts, he could utter them nobly, is clear, despite of Heraclius. That he is, besides, unequal ; often coldly perplexed when he means to be ingenious, only violent when he seeks to be inspired ; that he premeditates ecstasies, and is inclined to the attitudes of the orators ; in brief, that he 'not only' (and not seldom) 'sleeps but *snores*' — are facts as true of him as the praise is. His Hexaëmeron, to which we referred as his chief work, is rather a meditation or rhythmetical speech upon the finished creation, than a retrospection of the six days ; and also there is more of Plato in it than of Moses. It has many fine things, and whole passages of no ordinary eloquence, though difficult to separate and select.

Whatever eyes seek God to view His Light,
As far as they behold Him close in night !
Whoever searcheth with insatiate balls
Th' abysmal glare, or gazeth on Heaven's walls
Against the fire-disk of the sun, the same
According to the vision he may claim,
Is dazzled from his sense. What soul of flame
Is called sufficient to view onward thus
The way whereby the sun's light came to us ?

O distant Presence in fixed motion ! Known
To all men, and inscrutable to one :
Perceived — uncomprehended ! unexplained
To all the spirits, yet by each attained,
Because its God-sight is Thy work ! O Presence,
Whatever holy greatness of Thine essence
Lie virtue-hidden, Thou hast given our eyes
The vision of Thy plastic energies —
Not shown in angels only (those create
All fiery-hearted, in a mystic state
Of bodiless body) but, if order be
Of natures more sublime than they or we,
In highest Heaven, or mediate æther, or
This world now seen, or one that came before
Or one to come, — quick in Thy purpose, *there !*
Working in fire and water, earth and air —
In every tuneful star, and tree, and bird —
In all the swimming, creeping life unheard,
In all green herbs, and chief of all, in MAN.

There are other poems of inferior length, 'On the Persian War,' in three books, or, alas, 'auscultations,' — 'The Heracliad,' again on the Persian war, and in two (of course) auscultations again, — 'Against Severus,' 'On the Vanity of Life,' 'The War of the Huns,' and others. From the 'Vanity of Life,' which has much beauty and force, we shall take a last specimen : —

Some yearn to rule the state, to sit above,
And touch the cares of hate as near as love ;
Some their own reason for tribunal take,
And for all thrones the humblest prayers they make ;
Some love the orator's vain-glorious art, —
The wise love silence and the hush of heart, —
Some to ambition's spirit-curse are fain,
That golden apple with a bloody stain ;
While some do battle in her face (more rife
Of noble ends) and conquer strife with strife :
And while your groaning tables gladden these,
Satiety's quick chariot to disease,
Hunger the wise man helps, to water, bread,
And light wings to the dreams about his head.

The truth becomes presently obvious, that —

The sage o'er all the world his sceptre waves,
And earth is common ground to thrones and graves.

John Damascenus, to whom we should not give by any private impulse of admiration the title of Chrysorrhoas, accorded to him by his times, lived at Damascus, his native city, early in the eighth century, holding an unsheathed sword of controversy until the point drew down the lightning. He retired before the affront rather than the injury; and in company with his beloved friend and fellow poet, Cosmas of Jerusalem (whose poetical remains the writer of these Remarks has vainly sought the sight of, and therefore can only, as by hearsay, ascribe some value to them), hid the remnant of his life in the monastery of Saba, where Phocas of the twelfth century looked upon the tomb of either poet. John Damascenus wrote several acrostics on the chief festivals of the churches, which are not much better, although very much longer, than acrostics need be. When he writes out of his heart, without looking to the first letters of his verses, — as indeed, in his Anacreontic his eyes are too dim for iota hunting, — he is another man, and almost a strong man; for the heart being sufficient to speak, we want no Delphic oracle — 'Pan is NOT dead.' In our selection from the Anacreontic hymn, the tears seem to trickle audibly; we welcome them as a Castalia, or, rather, 'as Siloa's brook,' flowing by an oracle more divine than any Grecian one: —

From my lips in their defilement,
From my heart in its beguilement,
From my tongue which speaks not fair,
From my soul stained everywhere,
O my Jesus, take my prayer!
Spurn me not for all it says,
Not for words and not for ways,
Not for shamelessness endued!
Make me brave to speak my mood,
O my Jesus, as I would!
Or teach me, which I rather seek,
What to do and what to speak.

I have sinnèd more than she,
Who learning where to meet with Thee,
And bringing myrrh, the highest-priced,
Anointed bravely, from her knee,
Thy blessed feet accordingly,
My God, my Lord, my Christ!
As Thou saidest not 'Depart'
To that suppliant from her heart,
Scorn me not, O Word, that art
The gentlest one of all words said!
But give Thy feet to me instead
That tenderly I may them kiss
And clasp them close, and never miss
With over-dropping tears, as free
And precious as that myrrh could be,
T' anoint them bravely from my knee!
Wash me with Thy tears: draw nigh me,
That their salt may purify me.
THOU remit my sins who knowest
All the sinning to the lowest —
Knowest all my wounds, and seest
All the stripes Thyself decreest;
Yea, but knowest all my faith,
Seest all my force to death,
Hearest all my wailings low,
That mine evil should be so!
Nothing hidden but appears
In Thy knowledge, O Divine,
O Creator, Saviour mine —
Not a drop of falling tears,
Not a breath of inward moan,
Not a heart-beat — which is gone!

After this deep pathos of Christianity, we dare not say a word; we dare not even praise it as poetry: our heart is stirred, and not 'idly.' The only sound which can fitly succeed the cry of the contrite soul is that of Divine condonation or of angelic rejoicing. Let us who are sorrowful still, be silent too.

Although doubts, as broad as four hundred years, separate the earliest and latest period talked of as the age of SIMEON METAPHRASTES by those 'viri illustrissimi' the classical critics, we may set him down, without much peril to himself or us, at the close of the tenth century, or very early in the eleventh. He is chiefly known for his 'Lives of the Saints,' which have been lifted up as a mark both for honor and dishonor; which Psellus hints at as a favorite literature of the angels, which Leo Allatius exalts as chafing the temper of the heretics, and respecting which we, in an exemplary serenity, shall straightway accede to one half of the opinion of Bellarmine — that the work speaketh not as things actually happened, but as they might have happened — '*non ut res gestæ fuerant, sed ut geri poterant.*' *Our* half of this weighty opinion is the first clause — we demur upon '*ut geri poterant,*' — and we need not go further than the former to win a light of commentary for the term 'metaphrases,' applied to the saintly biographies in otherwise a doubtful sense, and worn obliquely upon the sleeve of the biographer Metaphrastes, in no doubtful token of his skill in metamorphosing things as they were into things as they might have been. And Simeon having received from Constantinople the honor of his birth within her walls, and returning to her the better honor of the distinctions and usefulness of his life, — so writeth Psellus, his encomiast, with a graceful turn of thought, — expired in an 'odor of sanctity' befitting the biographer of all the saints, — breathing out from his breathless remains such an incense of celestial sweetness, that if it had not been for the maladroitness of certain unfragrant persons whose desecration of the next tomb acted incontinently as a stopper, the whole earth might at this day be *metaphrased* to our nostrils, as steeped in an attar-gul of Eden or Ede! — we might be dwelling in a phœnix-nest at this day. Through the maladroitness, however, in question, there is lost to us every sweeter influence from the life and death of Simeon Metaphrastes than may result from the lives and deaths of his saints, and from other works of his, whether commentaries, orations, or poems; and we cannot add that the aroma from his writings bears any proportion in value to the fragrance from his sepulchre. Little of his poetry has reached us, and we are satisfied with the limit. There were three Simeons, who did precede our Simeon, as the world knoweth, and whose titles were Stylitæ or Columnarii, because it pleased them in their saintly volition to take the highest place and live out their natural lives supernaturally, each upon the top of a column. Peradventure the columns which our Simeon refused to live upon conspired against his poetry; peradventure it is on their account that we find ourselves between two alphabetic acrostics, written solemnly by his hand, and take up one wherein every alternate line begins with a letter of the alphabet; its companion in the couplet being left to run behind it, out of livery and sometimes out of breath. Will the public care to look upon such a curiosity? Will our verse-writers care to understand what harm may be done by a conspiration of columns — gods and men quite on one side? And will candid readers care to confess at last, that there is an earnestness in the poem, acrostic as it is — a leaning to beauty's side — which is above the acrosticism? Let us try: —

Ah, tears upon mine eyelids, sorrow on mine heart,
I bring Thee soul-repentance, Creator as Thou art!
Bounding joyous actions, deep as arrows go;
Pleasures self-revolving, issue into woe!
Creatures of our mortal, headlong rush to sin:
I have seen them; of them — ah me, — I have been!
Duly pitying Spirits, from your spirit-frame,
Bring your cloud of weeping, — worthy of the same!
Else I would be bolder; if that light of Thine,
Jesus, quell the evil, let it on me shine!
Fail me truth, is living, less than death forlorn,
When the sinner readeth — 'better be unborn'?
God, I raise toward Thee both eyes of my heart,
With a sharp cry — 'Help me!' — while mine hopes depart.
Help me! Death is bitter, all hearts comprehend;
But I fear beyond it — end beyond the end.
Inwardly behold me, how my soul is black:
Sympathize in gazing, do not spurn me back!
Knowing that Thy pleasure is not to destroy,
That Thou fain wouldst save me — this is all my joy.
Lo, the lion, hunting spirits in their deep,
(Stand beside me!) roareth — (help me!) nears to leap.
Mayst Thou help me, Master! Thou art pure alone,
Thou alone art sinless, one Christ on a throne.
Nightly deeds I loved them, hated day's instead;
Hence this soul-involving darkness on mine head.
O Word, who constrainest things estranged and curst,
If Thy hand can save me, that work were the first!
Pensive o'er my sinning, counting all its ways,
Terrors shake me, waiting adequate dismays.
Quenchless glories many, hast Thou — many a rod —
Thou, too, hast Thy measures. Can I bear Thee, God?
Rend away my counting from my soul's decline,
Show me of the portion of those saved of Thine!
Slow drops of my weeping to Thy mercy run:
Let its rivers wash me, by that mercy won!
Tell me what is worthy, in our dreary now,
As the future glory? (madness!) what, as THOU?
Union, oh, vouchsafe me to Thy fold beneath,
Lest the wolf across me gnash his gory teeth!
View me, judge me gently! spare me, Master bland
Brightly lift Thine eyelids, kindly stretch Thine hand!
Winged and choral angels! 'twixt my spirit lone,
And all deathly visions, interpose your own!
Yea, my Soul, remember death and woe inwrought —
After-death affliction, wringing earth's to nought!
Zone me, Lord, with graces! Be foundations built
Underneath me; save me! as Thou know'st and wilt!

The omission of our X (in any case too sullen a letter to be employed in the service of an acrostic) has permitted us to write line for line with the Greek; and we are able to infer to the honor of the Greek poet, that although he did not live upon a column, he was not far below one, in the virtue of self-mortification. We are tempted to accord him some more gracious and serious justice, by breaking away a passage from his 'Planctus Mariæ,' the lament of Mary on embracing the Lord's body; and giving a moment's insight into a remarkable composition, which, however deprived of its poetical right of measure, is, in fact, nearer to a poem, both in purpose and achievement, than any versified matter we have looked upon from this metaphrastic hand: —

'O, uncovered corse, yet Word of the Living One! self-doomed to be uplifted on the cross for the drawing of all men unto Thee, — what member of Thine hath no wound? O my blessed brows, embraced by the thorn-wreath which is pricking at my heart! O beautiful and priestly One, who hadst not where to lay Thine head and rest, and now wilt lay it only in the tomb, resting *there;* sleeping, as Jacob said, a lion's sleep! O cheeks turned to the smiter! O lips, new hive for bees, yet fresh from the sharpness of vinegar and bitterness of gall! O mouth, wherein was no guile, yet betrayed by the traitor's kiss! O hand, creative of man, yet nailed to the cross, and since stretched out unto Hades, with help for the first transgressor! O feet, once walking on the deep to hallow the waters of nature! O me, my son! . . . Where is thy chorus of sick ones? — those whom Thou didst cure of their diseases, and bring back from the dead? Is none here, but only Nicodemus, to draw the nails from those hands and feet? — none here, but only Nicodemus, to lift Thee from the cross heavily, heavily, and lay Thee in these mother-arms, which bore Thee long ago, in thy babyhood, and were glad *then?* These hands, which swaddled Thee then, let them bind Thy grave-clothes now. And yet, — O bitter funerals! — O Giver of life from the dead, liest Thou dead before mine eyes? Must *I*, who said "hush" beside Thy cradle, wail this passion upon Thy grave? *I*, who washed Thee in Thy first bath, must I drop on Thee these hotter tears? I, who raised Thee high in my maternal arms, — but *then* Thou leapedst, — *then* Thou sprangest up in Thy child-play!'

It is better to write so than to stand upon a column. And, although the passage does, both generally and specifically, in certain of its ideas, recall the antithetic eloquence of that Gregory Nazianzen before whom this Simeon must be dumb, we have touched his 'oration,' so called, nearer than our subject could permit us to do any of Gregory's, because the 'Planctus' involves an imagined situation, is poetical in its design. Moreover, we must prepare to look downwards; the poets were descending from the gorgeous majesty of the hexameter and the severe simplicity of iambics down through the mediate *versus politici*, a loose metre, adapted to the popular ear, to the lowest deep of a 'measured prose,'—which has been likened, but which *we* will not liken, to the blank verse of our times. Presently, we may offer an example from Psellus of a prose acrostic—the reader being delighted with the prospect! 'A whole silver threepence, mistress.'

MICHAEL PSELLUS lived midway in the eleventh century, and appears to have been a man of much aspiration toward the higher places of the earth. A senator of no ordinary influence, preceptor of the Emperor Michael previous to that accession, he is supposed to have included in his instructions the advantages of sovereignty, and in his precepts the most subtle means of securing them. We were about to add, that his acquirements as a scholar were scarcely less imperial than those of his pupil as a prince; but the expression might have been inappropriate. There are cases not infrequent, not entirely opposite to the present case, and worthy always of all meditation by such intelligent men as affect extensive acquisition,—when acquirements are not ruled by the man, but rule him. Whatever originates from the mind cannot obstruct her individual faculty; nay, whatever she receives inwardly and marks her power over by creating out of it a *tertium quid*, according to the law of the perpetual generation of spiritual verities, is not obstructive but impulsive to the evolution of faculty; but the erudition, whether it be erudition as the world showed it formerly, or miscellaneous literature, as the world shows it now, the accumulated acquirement of whatever character, which remains *extraneous* to the mind, is and must be in the same degree an obstruction and deformity. How many are there, from Psellus to Bayle, bound hand and foot intellectually with the rolls of their own papyrus—men whose erudition has grown stronger than their souls! How many whom we would gladly see washed in the clean waters of a little ignorance, and take our own part in their refreshment! Not that knowledge is bad, but that wisdom is better; and that it is better and wiser in the sight of the angels of knowledge to think out one true thought with a thrush's song and a green light for all lexicon (or to think it without the light and without the song—because truth is beautiful, where they are not seen or heard)—than to mummy our benumbed souls with the circumvolutions of twenty thousand books. And so Michael Psellus was a learned man.

We have sought earnestly, yet in vain,—and the fact may account for our ill-humor,—a sight of certain iambics upon vices and virtues, and Tantalus and Sphinx, which are attributed to this writer, and cannot be in the moon after all:—earnestly, yet with no fairer encouragement to our desire than what befalls it from his *poems* 'On the Councils,' the first of which, and only the first, through the softness of our charities, we bring to confront the reader:—

Know the holy councils, King, to their utmost number,
Such as roused the impious ones from their world-wide slumber!
Seven in all those councils were: Nice the first containing,
When the godly master-soul Constantine was reigning,
What time at Byzantium, hallowed with the hyssop,
In heart and word, Metrophanes presided as archbishop!
It cut away Arius' tongue's maniacal delusion,
Which cut off from the Trinity the blessed Homoousion—
Blasphemed (O miserable man!) the maker of the creature,
And low beneath the Father cast the equal Filial nature.

The prose acrostic, contained in an office written by Psellus to the honor of Simeon, is elaborated on the words 'I sing thee who didst write the metaphrases;' every sentence being insulated, and beginning with a charmed letter.

Say in a dance how we shall go,
Who never could a measure know?

why, thus—(and yet Psellus, who did *know* everything, wrote a synopsis of the metres!)—why, thus:—

'Inspire me, Word of God, with a rhythmetic chant, for I am borne onward to praise Simeon Metaphrastes and Logothetes, as he is fitly called, the man worthy of admiration!

'Solemnly from the heavenly heights did the Blessed Ghost descend on thee, wise one, and finding thine heart pure, rested there, there verily in the body!'

Surely we need not write any more. But Michael Psellus was a very learned man.

JOHN of EUCHAITA (or Euchania, or Theodoropolis,—the three names do appear through the twilight to belong to one city) was a bishop, probably contemporary with Psellus—is only a poet now: we turn to see the voice which speaks to us. It is a voice with a soul in it, clear and sweet and living: and we who have walked long in the desert, leap up to its sound as to the dim flowing of a stream, and would take a deep breath by its side both for the weariness which is gone and the repose which is coming. But it is a rarer thing than a stream in the desert; it is a voice in the desert—the only voice of a city. The city may have three names, as we have said, or the three names may more fitly appertain to three cities—scholars knit their brows and wax doubtful as they talk; but a city denuded of its multitudes it surely is, ruined even of its ruins it surely is: no exhalation arises from its tombs, the foxes have lost their way to it, the bittern's cry is as dumb as the vanished population—only the Voice remains. John Mauropus, of Euchaita, Euchania, Theodoropolis—one living man among many dead, as the Arabian tale goes of the city of enchantment—one speechful voice among the silent, sole survivor of the breath which maketh words, effluence of the soul replacing the bittern's cry—speak to us! And thou shalt be to us as a poet; we will salute thee by that high name. For have we not stood face to face with Michael Psellus and him of the metaphrases? Surely as a poet may we salute *thee!*

His poetry has, as if in contrast to the scenery of circumstances in which we find it, or to the fatality of circumstances in which it has *not* been found (and even Mr. Clarke in his learned work upon Sacred Literature, which is, however, incommunicative generally upon sacred poetry, appears unconscious of his being and his bishopric) — his poetry has a character singularly vital, fresh, and serene. There is nothing in it of the rapture of inspiration, little of the operativeness of art — nothing of imagination in a high sense, or of ear-service in any: he is not, he says, of those —

Who rain hard with redundancies of words,
And thunder and lighten out of eloquence.

His Greek being opposed to that of the Silentiarii and the Pisidæ by a peculiar simplicity and ease of collocation which the reader feels lightly in a moment, the thoughts move through its transparency with a certain calm nobleness and sweet living earnestness, with holy upturned eyes and human tears beneath the lids, till the reader feels lovingly too. We startle him from his reverie with an octave note on a favorite literary fashion of the living London, drawn from the voice of the lost city; discovering by that sound the first serial illustrator of pictures by poems, in the person of our Johannes. Here is a specimen from an annual of Euchaita, or Euchania, or Theodoropolis — we may say 'annual' although the pictures were certainly not in a book, but were probably ornaments of the beautiful temple in the midst of the city, concerning which there is a tradition. Here is a specimen selected for love's sake, because it 'illustrates' a portrait of Gregory Nazianzen: —

What meditates thy thoughtful gaze, my father?
To tell me some new truth? Thou canst not so!
For all that mortal hands are weak to gather
Thy blessed books unfolded long ago.

These are striking verses, upon the Blessed among women, weeping: —

O Lady of the passion, dost thou weep?
  What help can we then through our tears survey,
If such as thou a cause for wailing keep?
  What help, what hope, for us, sweet Lady, say?
  'Good man, it doth befit thine heart to lay
More courage next it, having seen me so.
  All other hearts find other balm to-day —
The whole world's consolation is my woe!'

Would any hear what can be said of a Transfiguration before Raffael's: —

Tremble, spectator, at the vision won thee!
  Stand afar off, look downward from the height,
Lest Christ too nearly seen should lighten on thee,
  And from thy fleshly eyeballs strike the sight,
  As Paul fell ruined by that glory white!
Lo, the disciples prostrate, each apart,
  Each impotent to bear the lamping light!
  And all that Moses and Elias might,
The darkness caught the grace upon her heart
And gave them strength for! *Thou*, if evermore
a God-voice pierce thy dark. — *rejoice*, adore!

Our poet was as unwilling a bishop as the most sturdy of the 'nolentes;' and there are poems written both in depreciation of, and in retrospective regret for, the ordaining dignity, marked by noble and holy beauties which we are unwilling to pass without extraction. Still we are constrained for space, and must come at last to his chief individual characteristic — to the gentle humanities which, strange to say, preponderate in the solitary voice — to the familiar smiles and sighs which go up and down in it to our ear. We will take the poem 'To his Old House,' and see how the house survives by his good help, when the sun shines no more on the golden statue of Constantine: —

O be not angry with me, gentle house,
  That I have left thee empty and deserted!
Since thou thyself that evil didst arouse,
  In being to thy masters so false-hearted,
In loving none of those who did possess thee,
  In minist'ring to no one to an end,
In no one's service caring to confess thee,
  But loving still the change of friend for friend,
And sending the last, plague-wise, to the door!
  And so, or ere thou canst betray and leave me,
I, a wise lord, dismiss thee, servitor,
  And antedate the wrong thou mayst achieve me
Against my will, by what my will allows;
Yet not without some sorrow, gentle house!

For oh, beloved house, what time I render
My last look back on thee I grow more tender!
Pleasant possession, hearth for father's age,
Dear gift of buried hands, sole heritage!
My blood is stirred; and love, that learnt its play
From all sweet customs, moves mine heart thy way!
For thou wast all my nurse and helpful creature,
For thou wast all my tutor and my teacher;
In thee through lengthening toils I struggled deep,
In thee I watched all night without its sleep,
In thee I worked the wearier daytime out,
Exalting truth, or trying by a doubt.

. . . .

And oh, my father's roof, the memory leaves
Such pangs as break mine heart, beloved eaves!
But God's word conquers all.

He is forced to a strange land, reverting with this benediction to the 'dearest house:' —

Farewell, farewell, mine own familiar one,
Estranged for evermore from this day's sun,
Fare-thee-well so! Farewell, O second mother,
O nurse and help, — remains there not another!
My bringer-up to some sublimer measure
Of holy childhood and perfected pleasure!
Now other spirits must thou tend and teach,
And minister thy quiet unto each,
For reasoning uses, if they love such use,
But nevermore to me. God keep thee, house,
God keep thee, faithful corner, where I drew
So calm a breath of life! And God keep you,
Kind neighbors! Though I leave you by His grace.
Let no grief bring a shadow to your face;
Because whate'er He willeth to be done
His will makes easy, makes the distant — one,
And soon brings all embraced before His throne!

We pass **Philip Solitarius**, who lived at the close of this eleventh century, even as we hav passed one or two besides of his fellow-poets; because they, having hidden themselves beyond the reach of our eyes and the endeavor of our hands, and we being careful to speak by knowledge rather than by testimony, nothing remains to us but this same silent passing — this regretful one, as our care to do better must testify — albeit our fancy will not, by any means, account them, with all their advantages of absence, 'the best part of the solemnity.'

Early in the twelfth century we are called to the recognition of THEODORE PRODROMUS, theologian, philosopher, and poet. His poems are unequal, consisting principally of a series of tetrastichs (Greek epigrams for lack of point, French epigrams for lack of poetry) upon the Old and New Testaments, and the Life of Chrysostom, — all nearly as bare of the rags of literary merit as might be expected from the design; and three didactic poems upon Love, Providence, and against Bareus the heretic, into which the poet has cast the recollected life of his soul. The soul deports herself as a soul should, with a vivacity and energy which work outward and upward into eloquence. The sentiments are lofty, the expression free; there is an instinct to a middle and an end. Music we miss, even to the elementary melody: the poet thinks his thoughts, and speaks them; not indeed what all poets, so called, do esteem a necessary effort, and indeed what we should thank him for doing; but he *sings* them in nowise, and they are not of that divine order which are crowned by right of their divinity with an inseparable aureole of sweet sound. His poem upon Love, — φιλια says the Greek word, but friendship does not answer to it, — is a dialogue between the personification and a stranger. It opens thus dramatically, the stranger speaking: —

Love! Lady diademed with honor, whence
And whither goest thou? Thy look presents
Tears to the lid, thy mien is vext and low,
Thy locks fall wildly from thy drooping brow,
Thy blushes are all pale, thy garb is fit
For mourning in, and shoon and zone are loose!
So changed thou art to sadness every whit,
And all that pomp and purple thou didst use,
That seemly sweet, that new rose on the mouth,
Those fair-smoothed tresses, and that graceful zone,
Bright sandals, and the rest thou haddest on,
Are all departed, gone to nought together!
And now thou walkest mournful in the train
Of mourning women! — where and whence, again?
Love. From earth to God my Father.
Stranger. Dost thou say
That earth of Love is desolated?
Love. Yea!
It so much scorned me.
Stranger. Scorned?
Love. And cast me out
From its door.
Stranger. From its door?
Love. As if without
I had my lot to die!

Love consents to give her confidence to the wondering stranger; whereupon, as they sit in the shadow of a tall pine, she tells a Platonic story of all the good she had done in heaven before the stars, and the angels, and the throned Triad, and of all her subsequent sufferings on the melancholy and ungrateful earth. The poem, which includes much beauty, ends with a quaint sweetness in the troth-plighting of the stranger and the lady. Mayst thou have been faithful to that oath, O Theodore Prodromus! but thou didst swear 'too much to be believed — so *much*.'

The poems 'On Providence' and 'Against Bareus' exceed the 'Love,' perhaps, in power and eloquence to the full measure of the degree in which they fall short of the interest of the latter's design. Whereupon we dedicate the following selection from the 'Providence' to Mr. Carlyle's 'gigmen' and all 'respectable persons:' —

Ah me! what tears mine eyes are welling forth,
To witness in this synagogue of earth
Wise men speak wisely while the scoffers sing,
And rich men folly, for much honoring!
Melitus trifles, — Socrates decrees
Our further knowledge! Death to Socrates,
And long life to Melitus! . . .

. . . .

Chiefdom of evil, gold! blind child of clay,
Gnawing with fixèd tooth earth's heart away!
Go! perish from us! objurgation vain
To soulless nature, powerless to contain
One ill unthrust upon it! Rather perish
That turpitude of crowds, by which they cherish
Bad men for their good fortune, or condemn,
Because of evil fortune, virtuous men!

. . . .

Oh, for a trumpet mouth! an iron tongue
Sufficient for all speech! foundations hung
High on Parnassus' top to bear my feet!
So from that watch-tower, words which shall be meet,
I may out-thunder to the nations near me —
'Ye worshippers of gold, poor rich men, hear me!
Where do ye wander? — for what object stand?
That gold is earth's ye carry in your hand,
And floweth earthward; bad men have its curse
The most profusely: would yourselves be worse
So to be richer? — better in your purse?
Your royal purple — 't was a dog that found it!
Your pearl of price — a sickened oyster owned it!
Your glittering gems are pebbles, dust-astray;
Your palace pomp was wrought of wood and clay,
Smoothed rock and moulded plinth! earth's clay, earth's wood,
Earth's common-hearted stones! Is this your mood,
To honor *earth*, to worship *earth*, nor blush?'
What dost thou murmur, savage mouth? Hush, hush,
Thy wrath is vainly breathed. The depth to tread
Of God's deep judgments, was not Paul's, he said.

The 'savage mouth' speaks in power, with whatever harshness: and we are tempted to contrast with this vehement utterance another short poem by the same poet, a little quaint withal, but light, soft, almost tuneful, — as written for a 'Book of Beauty,' and that not of Euchaita! The subject is 'LIFE.'

Oh, take me, thou mortal, — thy LIFE for thy praiser!
Thou hast met, found and seized me, and know'st what my ways are.

Nor leave me for slackness, nor yield me for pleasure,
Nor look up too saintly, nor muse beyond measure!
There 's the veil from my head — see the worst of my mourning!
There are wheels to my feet — have a dread of their turning!
There are wings round my waist — I may flatter and flee thee!
There are yokes on my hands — fear the chains I decree thee!
Hold *me!* hold a shadow, the winds as they quiver;
Hold *me!* hold a dream, smoke, a track on the river.

Oh! take me, thou mortal, — thy Life for thy praiser,
Thou hast met not, and seized not, nor know'st what my ways are!
Nay, frown not, and shrink not, nor call me an aspen;
There 's the veil from my head! I have dropped from thy clasping!
A fall-back within it I soon may afford thee;
There are wheels to my feet — I may roll back toward thee!
There are wings round my waist — I may flee back and clip thee!
There are yokes on my hands — I may soon cease to whip thee!
Take courage! I rather would hearten than hip thee!

John Tzetza divides the twelfth century with his name, which is not a great one. In addition to an iambic fragment upon education, he has written indefatigably in the metre *politicus*, what must be read, if read at all, with a corresponding energy, — thirteen 'chiliads,' of 'variæ historiæ,' so called after Ælian's, — Ælian's without the 'honey-tongue,' — very various histories indeed, about crocodiles and flies, and Plato's philosophy and Cleopatra's nails, and Samson and Phidias, and the resurrection from the dead, and the Calydonian boar, — 'everything under the sun' being, in fact, their imperfect epitome. The omission is simply POETRY! there is no apparent consciousness of her entity in the mind of this versifier; no aspiration towards her presence, not so much as a sigh upon her absence. We do not, indeed, become aware, in the whole course of this laborious work, of much unfolding of faculty — take it lower than the poetical; of nothing much beyond an occasional dry, sly, somewhat boorish humor, which being good humor besides, would not be a bad thing were its traces only more extended. But the general level of the work is a dull talkativeness, a prosy adversity, who is no 'Daughter of Jove,' and a slumberousness without a dream. We adjudge to our reader the instructive history of the Phœnix.

A phœnix is a single bird and synchronous with nature:
The peacock cannot equal him in beauty or in stature.
In radiance he outshines the gold; the world in wonder yieldeth;
His nest he fixeth in the trees, and all of spices buildeth.
And when he dies, a little worm, from out his body twining,
Doth generate him back again whene'er the sun is shining.
He lives in Ægypt, and he dies in Æthiopia only, as
Asserts Philostratus, who wrote the Life of Apollonius.
And (as the wise Ægyptian scribe, the holy scribe, Chæremon,
Hath entered on these Institutes, all centre their esteem on)
Seven thousand years and six of age, this phœnix of the story
Expireth from the fair Nile side, whereby he had his glory.

In the early part of the fourteenth century, Manuel Phile, pricked emulously to the heart by the successful labors of Tzetza, embraced into identity with himself the remaining half of Ælian, and developed in his poetical treatise 'On the Properties of Animals,' to which Isachimus Camerarius provided a conclusion — the 'Natural History' of that industrious and amusing Greek-Roman. The Natural History is translated into verse, but by no means glorified; and yet the poet of animals, Phile, has carried away far more of the Ælian honey clinging to the edges of his *patera* than the poet of the Chiliads did ever wot of. What we find in him is not beauty, what we hear in him is not music, but there is an open feeling for the beautiful which stirs at a word, and we have a scarcely confessed contentment in hearkening to those twice-told stories of birds and beasts and fishes, measured out to us in the low monotony of his chanting voice. Our selections shall say nothing of the live grasshopper, called, with the first breath of this paper, an emblem of the vital Greek tongue; because the space left to us closes within our sight, and the science of the age does not thirst to receive, through our hands, the history of grasshoppers, according to Ælian or Phile either. Everybody knows what Phile tells us here, that grasshoppers live upon morning dew, and cannot sing when it is dry. Everybody knows that the lady grasshopper sings not at all. And if the moral, drawn by Phile from this latter fact, of the advantage of silence in the female sex generally, be true and important, it is also too obvious to exact our enforcement of it. Therefore we pass by the grasshopper, and the nightingale too, for all her fantastic song; and hasten to introduce to European naturalists a Philhellenic species of *heron*, which has escaped the researches of Cuvier, and the peculiarities of which may account to the philosophic reader for that instinct of the 'wisdom of our forefathers,' which established an English university in approximation with the Fens. It is earnestly to be hoped that the nice ear in question for the Attic dialect may still be preserved among the herons of Cambridgeshire: —

A Grecian island nourisheth to bless
A race of herons in all nobleness.
If some barbarian bark approach the shore,
They hate, they flee, — no eagle can outsoar!
But if by chance an Attic voice be wist,
They grow softhearted straight, philhellenist;

Press on in earnest flocks along the strand,
And stretch their wings out to the comer's hand.
Perhaps he nears them with a gentle mind, —
They love his love, though foreign to their kind!
For so the island giveth wingèd teachers,
In true love lessons, to all wingless creatures.

He has written, besides, 'A Dialogue between Mind and Phile,' and other poems; and we cannot part without taking from him a more solemn tone, which may sound as an 'Amen' to the good we have said of him. The following address to the Holy Spirit is concentrated in expression: —

O living Spirit, O falling of God-dew,
O Grace which dost console us and renew,
O vital light, O breath of angelhood,
O generous ministration of things good,
Creator of the visible, and best
Upholder of the great unmanifest
Power infinitely wise, new boon sublime
Of science and of art, constraining might,
In whom I breathe, live, speak, rejoice, and write, —
Be with us in all places, for all time!

'And now,' saith the patientest reader of all, 'you have done. Now we have watched out the whole night of the world with you, by no better light than these poetical rushlights, and the wicks fail, and the clock of the universal hour is near upon the stroke of the seventeenth century, and you have surely done!' Surely *not*, we answer; for we see a hand which the reader sees not, which beckons us over to Crete, and clasps within its shadowy fingers a roll of hymns Anacreontical, written by Maximus Margunius: and not for the last of our readers would we lose this last of the Greeks, owing him salutation. Yet the hymns have, for the true Anacreontic fragrance, a musty odor, and we have scant praise for them in our nostrils. Their inspiration is from Gregory Nazianzen, whose 'Soul and Body' are renewed in them by a double species of transmigration; and although we kiss the feet of Gregory's high excellences, we cannot admit any one of them to be a safe conductor of poetical inspiration. And, in union with Margunius's plagiaristic tendencies, there is a wearisome lengthiness, harder to bear. He will knit you to the whole length of a 'Honi soit qui mal y pense,' till you fall asleep to the humming of the stitches what time you should be reading the 'moral.' We ourselves once dropped into a 'distraction,' as the French say, — for nothing could be more different from what the English say, than our serene state of self-abnegation, — at the beginning of a house-building by this Maximus Margunius: when, reading on some hundred lines with our bare bodily eyes, and our soul starting up on a sudden to demand a measure of the progress, behold, he was building it still, with trowel in the same hand: it was not forwarder by a brick. The swallows had time to hatch two nestfuls in a chimney while he finished the chimney-pot! Nevertheless he has moments of earnestness, and they leave beauties in their trace. Let us listen to this extract from his fifth hymn: —

Take me as a hermit lone
With a desert life and moan;
Only Thou anear to mete
Slow or quick my pulse's beat;
Only Thou, the night to chase
With the sunlight in Thy face!
Pleasure to the eyes may come
  From a glory seen afar,
But if life concentre gloom
  Scattered by no little star,
  Then, how feeble, God, we are!
Nay, whatever bird there be,
  (Æther by his flying stirred),
He, in this thing, must be free —
  And I, Saviour, am Thy bird,
Pricking with an open beak
At the words that Thou dost speak!
Leave a breath upon my wings,
That above these nether things
I may rise to where Thou art,
I may flutter next Thine heart!
For if a light within me burn,
It must be darkness in an urn,
Unless, within its crystalline,
That unbeginning light of Thine
Shine! oh Saviour, *let* it shine!

He is the last of our Greeks. The light from Troy city, with which all Greek glory began, 'threw three-times six,' said Æschylus, that man with a soul, — beacon after beacon, into the heart of Greece. 'Three-times six,' too, threw the light from Greece, when her own heart-light had gone out like Troy's, onward along the ridges of time. Three-times six — but what faint beacons are the last! — sometimes only a red brand; sometimes only a small trembling flame; sometimes only a white glimmer as of ashes breathed on by the wind; faint beacons and far! How far! We have watched them along the cloudy tops of the great centuries, through the ages dark but for them, — and now stand looking with eyes of farewell upon the last pale sign on the last mist-bound hill. But it is the sixteenth century. Beyond the ashes on the hill a red light is gathering; above the falling of the dews a great sun is rising: there is a rushing of life and song upward — let it still be UPWARD! Shakespeare is in the world! And the Genius of English Poetry, she who only of all the earth is worthy (Goethe's spirit may hear us say so, and smile), stooping, with a royal gesture, to kiss the dead lips of the Genius of Greece, stands up her successor in the universe, by virtue of that chrism, and in right of her own crown.

III. NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

[The task of annotating Mrs. Browning's text is greatly simplified by the fact of her constitutional unwillingness to change the form of any thought that she had once expressed fairly to her own satisfaction. It belonged, perhaps, to her very serious conception of the Poet's 'divine mission,' and of her own, as a poet by predestination, however unworthy that her thought, as first visibly, and often painfully *enfanté*, seemed to her a species of organism, — which might be clumsy and unfortunate in shape, but which could not be altered without mutilation. She said a good deal about Art, — particularly in her later days, when she lived nearer to the *grand monde* of letters than she had done in her earlier and more productive period. But in truth, she was much more a moralist than an artist, and had very little of the consuming passion for mere beauty, and the unresting pursuit of external perfection, which characterize the poets of supremely artistic temperament, like Tennyson and Keats. Even her extensive classical studies, — and they were extensive, though not analytic, nor what would now be considered profound, failed, curiously enough, to develop her sense of form; and Greek was to her, if such a thing be possible, almost too much like a living language. No great writer was ever more humble and reasonable about the intrinsic worth of her own productions than Mrs. Browning; but the words in which she said her say seemed to her essential, and preëminently her own affair; and when once she had called the Seer of Patmos 'apolyptic John,' it required a good deal of argument on the part of persons whose judgment she deeply respected to convince her that the adjective would not do. She altered (see note, p. 516), at Wordsworth's own request, a line in her sonnet on Haydon's portrait, without very materially improving it; and she made a change also — it may be presumed upon representation — in one of the more dithyrambic stanzas of *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*. In the earlier editions of that florid poetical romance, we have, as illustrating the extent of the heroine's landed possessions, and the material interests which she controlled, the statement that —

> the resonant steam-eagles
> Follow far on the direction of her little dove-like hand.

Both the eagle and the dove were banished subsequently, and the verse now reads —

> And the palpitating engines snort in steam across her acres —

which comes a little nearer to scientific truth, no doubt; though it must be confessed that both these attempted impersonations of the locomotive remind the reader unpleasantly of the ear-splitting melodies of the 'Siren.'

When a fourth edition of *Aurora Leigh* was called for, in January, 1859, two years after its original publication, Robert Browning wrote from Rome to Mr. Ruskin that a corrected edition of *Aurora Leigh* had just been sent off to London which had cost 'us' (Mrs. Browning and himself) 'a great deal of pains;' and Mrs. Browning wrote to a friend at the same time that she had 'dizzied herself with "*ifs*" and "*ands*."' The labor which irked her so was indeed almost confined to the 'ifs' and 'ands;' that is to say, to those minute corrections in grammar and punctuation which leave, for the most part, the thought and imagery of a passage unchanged, but which ought, in fairness to the author, to be accepted without question, as annulling the previous reading. Not one of the more important and memorable passages in the poem was noticeably modified. In looking through the letters of both poets for passages calculated to throw light on the origin and growth of Mrs. Browning's principal works, we find enough and to spare in her own, but are disappointed to discover so little in her husband's. The slight reference in the note to Ruskin mentioned above is almost solitary; and even there, it will be observed, he speaks in no wise as a critic, but rather as one partner in a firm with unlimited liability. We know, in a general way, how exalted was the rank which Robert Browning assigned to his wife's genius; that he thought the Portuguese Sonnets the finest written in any language since Shakespeare's; that it was through the charm and power over him of her earlier writings that he first came to adore her. We have the eloquent dedications of *Men and Women* to her living self, and of the *Ring and the Book* to her memory, and we have the conjecture, not very well supported, however, of Mr. Browning's biographer that he intended to portray Mrs. Browning in the beautiful character of Pompilia. But for any more specific judgment or intimate commentary, we shall seek the husband's published correspondence in vain. It is to be remembered, of course, that he himself destroyed, some years before his death, all those letters to members of his own family in which he would have been most likely, perhaps, to speak of his wife's work without reserve; and also that from the time, beginning with the publication of *Casa Guidi Windows*, when Mrs. Browning's muse began to occupy itself so much more than formerly with political events, and social and philanthropic speculations, he may purposely have refrained from any allusion to what she published, for the reason that while bating not one jot of his loyal admiration for her character and gifts, he did not always entirely agree with her opinions.]

A ROMANCE OF THE GANGES.

Page 30, line 98. *To the holy house of snow.* The Hindoo heaven is localized on the summit of Mount Meru — one of the mountains of Himalaya or Himmaleh, which signifies, I believe, in Sanscrit, the abode of snow, winter, or coldness.

Line 104. *The humming-bird is in the sun.*

Himadeva, the Indian god of love, is imagined to wander through the three worlds, accompanied by the humming-bird, cuckoo, and gentle breezes.

Page 31, line 157. *To cast upon thine hair.*

The casting of rice upon the head, and the fixing of the band or tali about the neck, are parts of the Hindoo marriage ceremonial.

Line 189. *Thy lily hath not changed a leaf.*

The Ganges is represented as a white woman, with a water-lily in her right hand, and in her left a lute.

Sounds.

Page 38, line 38. *Like a singing in a dream.*

While floating up bright forms ideal,
  Mistress or friend, around me stream;
Half sense-supplied, and half unreal,
  Like music mingling with a dream.
— *John Kenyon.*

I do not doubt that the 'music' of the two concluding lines mingled, though very unconsciously, with my own 'dream' and gave their form and pressure to the above distich. The ideas however being sufficiently distinct, I am satisfied with sending this note to the press after my verses, and with acknowledging another obligation to the valued friend to whom I already owe so many. — 1844.

Page 39, line 107. *As the seer-saint of Patmos, loving John.*

[This line, as first printed in 1838, contained an extraordinary abbreviation: 'As erst in Patmos *apolyptic* John.' Miss Barrett had to be convinced by Mr. Boyd and others that the word was inadmissible before she substituted the above reading.]

The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus.

Page 43, line 37. *As Moses did, and die, — and then live most.*

It is a Jewish tradition that Moses died of the kisses of God's lips.

A Drama of Exile.

Page 81, line 1023. *Of manhood's curse of labor.*

Adam recognizes in *Aquarius*, the Waterbearer, and *Sagittarius*, the Archer, distinct types of the man bearing and the man combating, — the passive and active forms of human labor. I hope that the preceding zodiacal signs — transferred to the earthly shadow and representative purpose — of Aries, Taurus, Cancer, Leo, Libra, Scorpio, Capricornus, and Pisces, are sufficiently obvious to the reader.

Line 1025. *But look off to those small humanities.*

Her maternal instinct is excited by Gemini.

On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon.

Page 98. [On October 31st, 1842, Miss Barrett wrote to Hugh Stuart Boyd that she had had a 'letter from *the great poet*' and was better pleased with it than were ever 'King John's barons with their charter.' The highly characteristic communication was as follows: —

Rydal Mount: Oct. 26, '42.

Dear Miss Barrett, — Through our common friend Mr. Haydon I have received a sonnet which his portrait of me suggested. I should have thanked you sooner for that effusion of a feeling towards myself, with which I am much gratified, but I have been absent from home and much occupied.

The conception of your sonnet is in full accordance with the painter's intended work, and the expression vigorous; yet the word 'ebb,' though I do not myself object to it, nor wish to have it altered, will I fear prove obscure to nine readers out of ten.

A vision free
And noble, Haydon, hath thine art released.

Owing to the want of inflections in our language the construction here is obscure. Would it not be a little [better] thus? — I was going to write a small change in the order of the words, but I find it would not remove the objection. The verse, as I take it, would be somewhat clearer thus, if you would tolerate the redundant syllable: —

By a vision free
And noble, Haydon, is thine art released.

I had the gratification of receiving, a good while ago, two copies of a volume of your writing, which I have read with much pleasure, and beg that the thanks which I charged a friend to offer may be repeated [to] you.

It grieved me much to hear from Mr. Kenyon that your health is so much deranged. But for that cause I should have presumed to call upon you when I was in London last spring.

With every good wish, I remain, dear Miss Barrett, your much obliged
Wm. Wordsworth.

[Postmark: Ambleside, Oct. 28, 1842.]
Letters of Mrs. Browning, vol. i. p. 113.

A poet whose gravity of spirit had been less profound than Wordsworth's would hardly have known how to suggest alterations in the lines written by another poet on his own personal appearance. It may be added that although Miss Barrett altered the passage criticised by the Laureate, she did not accept his amendment. The lines now read: —

A noble vision free
Our Haydon's hand has flung out from the mist.]

The Lost Bower.

Page 150, stanza ix. *Keepers of Piers Plowman's visions through the sunshine and the snow.*

The Malvern Hills of Worcestershire are the scene of Langland's Visions, and thus present the earliest classic ground of English poetry.

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

Page 158, line 115. *'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber.*

A fact rendered pathetically historical by Mr. Horne's report of his Commission. The name of the poet of 'Orion' and 'Cosmo de' Medici' has, however, a change of associations, and comes in time to remind me that we have some noble poetic heat of literature still, — however open to the reproach of being somewhat gelid in our humanity. — 1844.

CROWNED AND BURIED.

Page 162, stanza xviii. *Green watching hills, ye witnessed what was done.*

Written at Torquay.

Stanza xxii. *And grave-deep 'neath the cannon-moulded column.*

It was the first intention to bury him under the column.

L. E. L.'s LAST QUESTION.

Page 179, stanza vi. *Their singer was to be, in darksome death.*

Her lyric on the Polar Star came home with her latest papers.

CATARINA TO CAMOENS.

Page 182, stanza xvi. *Keep my riband, take and keep it.*

She left him the riband from her hair.

Page 188. THE DEAD PAN.

[The subject of 'The Dead Pan' was first suggested to Miss Barrett by John Kenyon's translation of Schiller's *Gods of Greece.* We have seen what importance she attached to its position at the end of the Poems published, in two volumes, in 1844. She wished it to be her last and most emphatic word to the public upon this occasion, for it represented a tremendous intellectual effort on her part, — nothing less than an attempted synthesis of Paganism and Christianity. The poem was, however, criticised with very special severity, not merely for its flagrant faults of rhyme and rhythm, but for the free and, as it seemed to many, irreverent use made, in the concluding stanzas, of the name or names of the Christian Deity. Even Mr. Kenyon remonstrated with the poetess, and begged her to alter or suppress those last verses, but found her intractable and able to defend the faith was in her very passionately. See *Letters of Mrs. Browning*, vol. i. pp. 127–130.]

Page 207. A DEAD ROSE AND OTHER POEMS.

[In October, 1846, only a few weeks after Mrs. Browning's romantic marriage, there appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* seven poems by her, some of which had been in the editor's hands for a considerable time. It illustrates the excessive tenderness of the bride's filial conscience, that she was deeply distressed for fear her father should give a too literal interpretation to these poems, and see in some of their expressions a calculated defiance of himself. 'I am so vexed,' she wrote to Miss Mitford on the 9th of November, 'about these poems appearing just now in Blackwood. Papa must think it *impudent* of me. It is unfortunate.' The poems were: 'A Woman's Shortcomings,' 'A Man's Requirements,' 'Maud's Spinning' (published among her poems as 'A Year's Spinning'), 'A Dead Rose,' 'Change upon Change,' and 'Hector in the Garden.' To one who re-reads them now, there seems to be very little in any of these pieces which could have been offensive, even to so morbid and biased a reader as Mr. Moulton-Barrett. The secret of the writer's heart, which already had been confided with magnificent *abandon* to the Portuguese Sonnets, is assuredly not betrayed in these poems.]

Page 214. SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE.

[Miss Barrett's daring innovations in rhyme (they were less frequent and conspicuous in the work of *Mrs. Browning*) were never the result of carelessness. She was always very much grieved at any such suggestion, and, as far as it was in her gentle nature to do so, she resented it. She honestly believed that in making *panther* rhyme with *saunter*, *virtues* with *certes*, and *turret* with *chariot*, she was 'widening the artistic capabilities of the English language.' It was just the species of fond delusion to which an original mind whose early development has been solitary, is especially prone. Yet it is a curious fact that, whenever she was under the stress of an emotion strong enough to make her forget herself, her 'mission' as a poet, and her supposed moral and artistic responsibilities, her versification became almost flawless. It was so in 'Cowper's Grave,' in the matchless Portuguese Sonnets, and even in *Casa Guidi Windows*, which, though weak enough as a political pamphlet, still glows with the fresh inspiration which her sensitive soul inevitably received from its first contact with Italy.]

Page 224. CASA GUIDI WINDOWS.

[There is a singular felicity about the title chosen by Mrs. Browning for her initial poem on Italy. She herself says of *Casa Guidi Windows* that it was 'a meditation and a dream,' and the very name seems to confess a certain superficiality in her first outlook upon that stern secular struggle for national independence, which began in the early years of the nineteenth century, and has hardly reached, even as yet, a securely triumphant conclusion. The events of 1847 and 1848 were a spectacle to the newly arrived poetess; one part only though undoubtedly the most vivid and affecting part of the pageant which all Italy presented to a learned and visionary spectator who had never been out of England before, and who had passed years of her life immured in the dim dungeon of a London bedchamber. See *Letters of Mrs. Browning*, vol. i. pp. 386–388.

The second part of the poem, dated two years later than the first, is vaguely denunciatory in tone, and on the whole very despondent concerning the future of Italy. Yet it contains one or two of Mrs. Browning's noblest bits of versification, such as the tribute to Carlo Alberto, and the pathetic passage near the close beginning —

> Still graves, where Italy is talked upon!
> Still, still, the patriot's tomb, the stranger's hate!

and one does not quite understand upon what grounds the author anticipated for *Casa Guidi Windows* a peculiarly hostile reception in England. 'I have a book coming out,' she wrote to Miss Isa Blagden on May 1, 1851, 'which will prevent everybody else except you from ever speaking to me again!']

Page 225, line 42. *Void at Verona, Juliet's marble trough.*

They show at Verona, as the tomb of Juliet, an empty trough of stone.

Line 73. *And Dawn and Twilight wait in marble scorn.*

These famous statues recline in the Sagrestia Nuova, on the tombs of Giuliano de' Medici, third son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Lorenzo of Urbino, his grandson. Strozzi's epigram on the Night, with Michel Angelo's rejoinder, is well known.

Page 228, line 100. *They bade thee build a statue up in snow.*

This mocking task was set by Pietro, the unworthy successor of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Page 228, lines 256, 257.

Savonarola's soul went out in fire
Upon our Grand-duke's piazza.

Savonarola was burnt for his testimony against papal corruptions as early as March, 1498: and, as late as our own day, it has been a custom in Florence to strew with violets the pavement where he suffered, in grateful recognition of the anniversary.

Page 229, lines 321–323.

Pass
The left stair, where at plague time Machiavel
Saw One with set fair face as in a glass.

See his description of the plague of Florence.

Line 334. *A king stood bare before its sovran grace.*

Charles of Anjou, in his passage through Florence, was permitted to see this picture while yet in Cimabue's 'bottega.' The populace followed the royal visitor, and, from the universal delight and admiration, the quarter of the city in which the artist lived was called 'Borgo Allegri.' The picture was carried in triumph to the church, and deposited there.

Line 363. *Whom Cimabue found among the sheep.*

How Cimabue found Giotto, the shepherd-boy, sketching a ram of his flock upon a stone, is prettily told by Vasari, — who also relates that the elder artist Margheritone died 'infastidito' of the successes of the new school.

Page 233, line 625. *Did pile the empty marbles as thy tomb.*

The Florentines, to whom the Ravennese refused the body of Dante (demanded of them 'in a late remorse of love'), have given a cenotaph in this church to their divine poet. Something less than a grave!

Line 630. *Good lovers of our age to track and plough.*

In allusion to Mr. Kirkup's discovery of Giotto's fresco portrait of Dante.

Page 241, line 1179. *From Tuscan Bellosguardo, wide awake.*

Galileo's villa, close to Florence, is built on an eminence called Bellosguardo.

Page 242, line 19. *We poets, wandered round by dreams, who hailed.*

See the opening passage of the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus.

Page 251, line 607. *Even Apollonius might commend this flute.*

Philostratus relates of Apollonius how he objected to the musical instrument of Linus the Rhodien that it could not enrich or beautify. The history of music in our day would satisfy the philosopher on one point at least.

Page 254. AURORA LEIGH.

[The inspiration and the main purport of *Aurora Leigh* were frankly socialistic, — as socialism was understood by disinterested dreamers half a century ago.

The poem, or novel, 'I flatter myself it 's a novel,' Mrs. Browning wrote to one friend, was begun under the immediate impulse of certain studies in the works of Louis Blanc, Prudhon, and other theorists which she and her husband had made together and continued with great enthusiasm during the winter of 1855–56, when the Brownings were once more living in Paris. Mr. Browning, to whom solitude, stillness, and reasonably congenial surroundings were essential to composition, was immensely struck by the power of mental abstraction which his wife displayed during that winter of work at high pressure. 'She wrote in pencil,' Robert Browning's biographer tells us, 'as she lay on the sofa in her sitting-room open to interruption from chance visitors, or from her little omnipresent son; simply hiding the paper beside her if any one came in, and taking it up again when she was free. And if this process was conceivable, in the large, comparatively silent spaces of their Italian home, and amidst habits of life which reserved social intercourse to the close of the working-day, it baffles belief when one thinks of it as carried on in the conditions of a Parisian winter, and the little salon of the apartment in the Rue du Colisée, where those months were spent.' (*Life of Robert Browning*, by Mrs. Sutherland-Orr, vol. i. p. 302.)

The villa on Bellosguardo where the final scene of the poem passes was, in the main, the Villa Briochion, which had been taken on a long lease by Miss Isa Blagden, and concerning the view from which Mrs. Browning wrote, after having tea upon the terrace there one day in early April: 'You seem to be lifted above the world, in a divine ecstasy. Oh, what a vision!' The vision which must indeed haunt the memory of all who have ever seen it, is painted as faithfully as words can paint, in that passage of the seventh book of *Aurora Leigh* which begins,

> I found a house in Florence on the hill.

The great popularity of *Aurora Leigh* on its first appearance was apparently due to the fact that, while it embodied some of the most revolutionary sentiments concerning social matters which chanced to be rife at the time, the story was interesting and sensational enough to bear the average reader smoothly and rapidly above the dark places of the intrigue. Nevertheless, the daring character of the plot, and the absolute freedom with which many of the more obscure and painful questions connected with the greatest of social evils were handled, exposed the author once more to ruthless criticism in some highly respectable quarters. But if, in the entire singleness of her intention, Mrs. Browning was amazed and distressed to learn that men of letters who were also men of the world, such as Thackeray, strongly demurred to her experiment, while a cynical recluse like Edward Fitzgerald fiercely condemned, and the editor of the *Tablet* did not hesitate to qualify the poem as 'grossly indecent;' she could comfort herself with the knowledge that her American publisher 'shed tears of sympathy' over the proof, and that to so lofty and uncompromising a moralist as John Ruskin it was 'the finest poem written in any language in this century.']

Page 410. POEMS BEFORE CONGRESS.

[During the decade of suspense and enforced inaction, so trying to all true Italian patriots, which intervened between 1849 and 1859, both Mr. and Mrs. Browning had come to identify themselves much more deeply with the National Cause than they had done when they were newcomers in Tuscany. When that most intemperate of Mrs. Browning's publications the *Poems before Congress* first appeared, about six months after the sharp disappointment of Villafranca, she wrote to her sister-in-law, Miss Sariana Browning, that she and her husband had begun writing on the Italian question together at his suggestion, meaning to publish jointly, but that he subsequently abandoned the project, which she carried on alone.

It is made clear enough by later events and publications of Robert Browning's own that the point where he differed most widely from his wife's conclusions on the Italian question was in his estimate of the character and the mission to Italy of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. He could not echo the rapture of hero-worship, — the extravagant adulation of that high-strung Ode which stood at the head of the *Poems before Congress*, under the title of 'Napoleon III. and Italy,' but neither would he dissent from his wife before the world. To us, who have long known on how shallow and unsteady a foundation the imposing fabric of the second French Empire was reared, and how often, when it appeared boldest, the policy of Napoleon III. was merely desperate, it is even more difficult to understand Mrs. Browning's adoring faith in the French Emperor.

Her frenzied devotion withstood even the staggering blow dealt by the summary Peace of Villafranca, and enabled her speedily to rally her hopes, though her health never recovered from that shock. She had an attack of severe illness in consequence; but the moment she was able to hold a pen she wrote from Siena to Miss Browning, that what had so prostrated her was — 'the blow on the *heart* about the peace after all that excitement and exultation, that walking on the clouds for weeks and months, and then the sudden stroke and fall, and the impotent rage against all the nations of the earth — selfish, inhuman, wicked — who forced the hand of Napoleon, and truncated his great intentions.' (*Letters of Mrs. Browning*, vol. ii. p. 320.)

The truth is that, while Mrs. Browning possessed, as clever women often do, a certain amount of political insight and an enormous capacity for political passion, of sound judgment in matters political she had none whatever: she could do nothing better for her own country, during the sharp, successive agonies of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny, when initial mistakes were made, no doubt, but which proved in the end so glorious a vindication of English valor and school of English character, than belabor the home government with the most opprobrious epithets which even her vast vocabulary could furnish. It was all 'dismal' and 'full of horror and despair,' — 'the alliance with France the only consolation' (!) She can even dismiss Florence Nightingale with a cold word of commendation, adding that she does not consider that *the best use to which we can put a gifted and accomplished woman is to make her a hospital nurse!*

We ourselves got, and indeed richly deserved, a sharp taste of Mrs. Browning's denunciatory eloquence in the piece entitled 'A Curse for a Nation,' which stands at the end of the *Poems before Congress*. In the prologue to the 'Curse,' Mrs. Browning seems for a moment almost to confuse herself with 'Apolyptic John.'

> 'I heard an angel speak last night
>   And he said "Write!"
> Write a Nation's Curse for me
> And send it over the Western Sea.'

She begins by protesting her unwillingness. 'Not so, my lord!

>   for I am bound by gratitude,
>   By love and blood
> To brothers of mine across the sea.'

But the god overpowers the pythoness and the curse follows. No doubt we were in mortal sin when these words were written, and escaped only by a speedy and terrible purgation the greater part of the woes which they denounced.

But the oddest and most inexplicable part of the whole matter is that many people in England, including the astute Mr. Chorley, who himself reviewed the *Poems before Congress* in the *Athenæum*, understood the Curse to be launched against England.]

Page 427. LORD WALTER'S WIFE.

Page 441, stanza vii. *And the King, with that stain on his scutcheon.*

Blue Book: Diplomatical Correspondence.

Page 499. AN ESSAY ON MIND.

Page 501, line 102. *And peeps at glory from some ancient's back.*

'The reason which the learned Bentley gave his daughter for not himself becoming an original writer, instead of wasting his talents on the works of others, is probably the cause of many not attempting original composition. Bentley seemed embarrassed at her honest question, and remained for a considerable time thoughtful. At length he observed: Child, I am sensible I have not always turned my talents to the proper use for which they were given me; yet I have done something: but the wit and genius of the old authors beguiled me, and as I despaired of raising myself up to their standard upon fair ground, I thought the only chance I had of looking over their heads was to get upon their shoulders.'— *Curiosities of Literature*, vol. i.

Lines 136, 137.

The gentle Cowley of our native clime
Lisp'd his first accents in Aonian rhyme.

A volume of Cowley's poems was published in his fifteenth year; and contains 'The Tragical History of Pyramus and Thispe,' written in his tenth.

Lines 138–141.

Alfieri's startling muse tuned not her strings,
And dumbly look'd 'unutterable things,'
Till when five lustrums o'er his head had past—

This poet's great mind exhibited no precocity. His 'Cleopatra,' written at the age of twenty-five years, first discovered its author's dramatic genius to himself and to the world.

Lines 156–158.

See in that breathless crowd Olorus stand,
While one fair boy hangs listening on his hand—
The young Thucydides.

It is said that Thucydides, in early youth, was present at the Olympic games when Herodotus recited his History; and that a burst of tears spoke his admiration. 'Take care of that boy,' observed the sage, turning to Olorus; 'he will one day make a great man!'

Page 502, line 229. *That hail 'th' eternal city' in their pride.*

'Imperium sine fine dedi,' says Virgil's Jupiter. How little did the writer of those four words dream of their surviving the Glory, whose eternity they were intended to predict! Horace too, in the most exulting of his odes, boldly proclaims that his fame will live as long as

Capitolium
Scandet cum tacitâ virgine Pontifex.

Yes! his fame *will live!*—but where now is the Pontifex, and the silent vestal? where now is the Capitol? Such passages are, to my mind, preëminently more affecting than all the ruins in the world!

Line 291. *And ultra Mitford soar'd to libel Greece.*

Mr. Mitford's acknowledged learning, and accuracy in detail, have a claim on our consideration, which we admit with readiness and pleasure; but prejudices, arising probably from early habits and associations, have deformed his work. He is evidently so afraid of taking the mob for the people, that he constantly takes the people for the mob—a perversion much in vogue among despots of Europe in the nineteenth century. He considers the Athenian Democracy as he would a classical kind of Radicalism; and generously endows Philip of Macedon with a 'right divine,' not only over his own possessions, but over those of his neighbors. Mr. Mitford lets his readers look at facts: but, whether shortsighted as himself or not, he will not allow them to enjoy that privilege unless they make use of his political glasses; which, by the way, are No. 20, —'ne plus ultra!'

Lines 307–309.

But lean on Reason, as your safest rule!
Let doubtful facts, with patient hand be led
To take their place on this Procrustian bed.

We shall find some clever and animated observations on this subject, in Voltaire's preface to his Charles XII. I should extract them, but the book is too well known for me to doubt their having come to the knowledge of most readers; and a new publication is perhaps the only place in which we are not glad to meet an old acquaintance.

Page 503, line 351. *Enlighten'd Miller of our modern days!*

Those who may think this praise excessive are referred to the *Philosophy of Modern History*, given to the world by Dr. Miller; and thence are requested to judge of the reality of the merit.

Lines 369–371.

The whisper'd sound which stole on Descartes' ear,
Hallowing the sunny visions of his youth,
With that eternal mandate, 'Search for Truth!'

'Descartes, when young, and in a country seclusion, his brain exhausted by meditation and his imagination heated to excess, heard a voice in the air, which called him to pursue the search of Truth: he never doubted the vision, and this dream, in the delirium of Genius, charmed him even in his after studies.'— *D'Israeli's Literary Character.*

Page 504, lines 427, 428.

He died, the glorious! who, with soaring sight,
Sought some new world to plant his foot of might.

Archimedes wrote to Hiero, that, if he had another world to stand on, he could move this by the power of his machinery. When Cicero stumbled on his grave, he found it, 'Septum undique et vestitum vepribus et dumetis.' What a homily!

Lines 448, 449.

So hard to bear with unobstructed sight,
Th' excess of darkness, or th' extreme of light.

Gray ingeniously asks, 'Must I plunge into metaphysics?' (he might in some cases have said history). 'Alas! I cannot see in the dark; Nature has not furnished me with the optics of a cat. Must I pore upon mathematics? Alas! I cannot see in too much light; I am no eagle.'

Lines 492, 493.

So Buffon erred — amidst his chilling dream
The judgment grew material as the theme.

Buffon was a materialist upon principle, though a Catholic by observance. Upon reading a poem on the immortality of the soul, he exclaimed, 'Religion would be a noble present if this were true.'

Line 506. *Sternly they strove — th' unequal race was run —*

Leibnitz attacked with violence Sir Isaac Newton's opinion, that the seeds of mortality would be developed in the fabric of the universe if unrenewed by its divine Maker. Such an opinion he considered 'impious;' and, in opposition to it, maintained, that as Creation proceeded from the hand of Perfection, it is perfect — and as perfect, immutable.

Page 505, line 526. *Devoted Southey! if thou had'st not tried.*

Few are ready to bear a more respectful tribute to Dr. Southey's poetical talents than the writer of this Work, who however begs to be allowed to admire his genius, without extending that admiration either to his politics or Hexameters.

Line 535. *Dwell not on parts, for parts contract the mind.*

Lord Bacon thus expresses himself — 'Sciences distinguished have a dependence upon universal knowledge, to be augmented, and rectified by the superior light thereof; as well as the parts and members of a science have upon the maxims of the same science, and the mutual light and consent which one part receiveth of another.' — *Interpretatio Naturæ.*

Line 584. *For too much learning maketh no man mad.*

Perhaps, after all, the great danger of knowing is in not knowing enough; and certainly 'il pie fermo' is not 'il piu basso.' 'It is true,' says Lord Bacon, 'that a little philosophy inclineth men's minds to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth their minds about to religion.' This is an acute observation, and if generalized will be found equally so. The errors attending Intellectual Elevation I have alluded to and allowed; but that elevation is only comparative. 'Alps on Alps arise!' and the *ars longa vita brevis* prevents our attaining the topmost height. In our progress towards it then is our risk, lest we rejoice to have gone a yard, without remembering we have a mile to go. Like the princess, in the pretty Arabian tale, who was ascending the mountain in search of her talking bird and golden water, if during the ascent we turn back to gaze, we are transformed into black stones — capable of impeding others, though not of advancing ourselves.

Line 594. *The sage how learned, and the man how meek!*

The character of Sir Isaac Newton forms a sublime comment on the foregoing note. 'I don't know,' said that greatest and humblest of men, 'what I may seem to the world; but as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of Truth lay all undiscovered before me.' — We find the anecdote in Spence.

Page 507, lines 705, 706.

Ev'n Cato, had he own'd the senate's will,
And wash'd his toga — had been Cato still!

Plutarch relates that Cato Uticensis was thought to disgrace the Prætorship by the meanness of his dress. To couple 'disgrace' with the name of Cato revolts the soul; and yet who would call his 'exigua toga' a *proof* of the loftiness of his virtue, or think him less a patriot if he had kept on his shoes?

Lines 723, 724.

'*All is idea, and nothing real springs*
But God and Reason!' (*not the right of kings?*)

An obvious question. Pyrrho the Elean, founder of the Ideal Philosophy, on the near approach of carts and carriages, did not think it worth while to turn aside or change his posture. Dr. Berkeley, with less consistency but more prudence, found time (and conscience) to write three sermons in vindication of passive obedience.

Lines 729–731.

'*While* (*coldly studious!*) *thine ingenious scroll*
Endows the mimic statue with a soul,
Compos'd of sense.'

It is the object of Condillac's work, 'Sur la Sensation,' to prove 'que la reflexion n'est dans son principe que la sensation même,' and that our ideas are only sensation transformed. His statue is very cleverly put together, but is a *statue* after all.

Line 734. *What triumph hath the 'Art of Thinking' there?*

'L'Art de penser' — title to one of Condillac's works.

Page 508, lines 803, 804.

To judge is yours — then why submissive call,
'*The master said so?*'

An 'argumentum ad verecundiam' used by the Pythagoreans. I so much admire a passage in Plato's Phædo, illustrative of these lines, that the reader must forgive my referring to it. Cebes supports with animation an opinion in opposition to Socrates, who, turning a gratified countenance ('ἡσθῆναί τέ μοι ἔδοξε,' says the narrator) to his other disciples, benignly observes: 'Cebes always looks into principles; neither will he admit, without examination, the sentiments of any man.'

We find in Dr. Reid the following striking precept, 'Let us, as becomes philosophers, lay aside authority.'

Lines 817, 818.

If human faults to Plato's page belong,
Not ev'n with Plato willingly go wrong.

Cicero's assertion, 'errare mehercule malo cum Platone quam cum istis vera sentire,' is more boldly said than singularly thought. How many are there, among the canaille of readers, prepared to praise an inferior volume, with the Waverley magic on its *titlepage;* to commend a commonplace by Rogers or a far-fetched allusion by Moore. Even among the more critical of us, have the names of Scott, and Moore, and Rogers no secret influence? Do we not so devoutly admire the noisy slippered Venus that at length we begin to reverence, abstractedly, the noisy slippers? This is so, and I will not quarrel with it; since to forget the trifling faults of a great writer is the gratitude we owe to his perfections. But what, in subjects of taste and sentiment, may be tolerated as pardonable enthusiasm, must in grave discussion be condemned as unpardonable weakness. If, therefore, we judge Cicero only by the above-cited passage, we shall pronounce him to be a good Platonist (in one sense of the word), but a very bad philosopher. It is not with him, 'Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas:' he loves truth less than he loves Plato.

Line 841. *Or Memnon's statue singing 'neath the sun.*

The statue of Memnon, the Ethiopian king, was said to utter musical sounds at the rising of the sun. Strabo witnessed this singular phenomenon, but could only explain it by conjecture.

Page 509, lines 872, 873.

But, ah! our Muse of Britain standing near,
Hath dimm'd my tablet with a pensive tear!

It is a practice too common, but manifestly unjust, to visit on the memory of distinguished authors their individual failings. I wish therefore to state expressly, that the Muse of Britain is not here supposed to animadvert on Lord Bacon's character as a statesman, with which she has nothing to do in this place. It is with regard to his writings that I cannot avoid expressing a regret — and I do so reverentially — that pages so glorious should be polluted by passages so servile. 'As men, we share his fame; as Englishmen, we feel his degradation. If, indeed, the *Novum Organum* and *Advancement of Learning* kindled our souls into a less proud consciousness of intellectual dignity, we might better brook hearing a king called 'a mortal god upon earth,' and James the First compared to Solomon. But Lord Bacon first teaches us how high Philosophy can soar, and then how low a philosopher can stoop.

Line 915. *And strikes Pierian chords — when Irving speaks!*

There is a pleasure in being benefited by the labors of Genius: there is a pride in possessing powers capable of benefiting. The pride Mr. Irving may justly feel; and which of his readers, or hearers, cannot boast the pleasure? It gratifies me to be enabled to express in this place my admiration of his talents, and my respect for their direction.

Lines 926, 927.

Ungrateful Plato! o'er thy cradled rest
The Muse hath hung, and all her love exprest.

Plato wrote poetry in his youth; and when indeed did not Plato write poetry? Longinus numbers him among the imitators of Homer —

> *Πάντων δὲ τούτων μάλιστα ὁ Πλάτων ἀπὸ τοῦ Ὁμηρικοῦ ἐκείνου νάματος εἰς αὐτὸν μυρίας ὅσας παρατρόπας ἀποχετευσάμενος.*

Page 510, lines 972, 973.

And as fair Eve, in Eden newly placed,
Gaz'd on her form, in limpid waters traced —

The reader will here perceive an allusion to that beautiful passage in *Paradise Lost*, book the fourth, where Eve describes to Adam her emotions on first beholding her own reflection in 'the clear smooth lake' —

> A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
> Bending to look on me — I started back —
> It started back, etc.

Lines 1022, 1023.

The artist lingers in the moon-lit glade,
And light and shade, with him, are — light and shade.

'Quam multa vident Pictores in umbris et eminentia quæ nos non videmus,' is the motto to Mr. Price's admirable essay on the Picturesque. Dugald Stewart proposes its reversion — 'Quam multa videmus nos quæ Pictores non vident,' which if it be as true as ingenious, will go a great way in assisting my position.

Lines 1044, 1045.

——— to trace
Nature's ideal form in Nature's place.

Lord Bacon says of Poetry, that 'it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shews of things to the desires of the mind; whereas Reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.' — *Advancement of Learning*, Book 2.

Page 511, lines 1079, 1080.

Wherein Conception only dies in state,
As Draco smother'd by the garments' weight.

The Athenian people being accustomed to testify their approbation by the casting of their garments on the approved individual, Draco was honorably smothered through excess of popularity.

Page 512, lines 1182–1184.

——— behold the cold, dumb sepulchre,
The ruined column — ocean, earth and air,
Man and his wrongs! — thou hast Tyrtæus there!

The inspiriting effect of the productions of this Greek poet, during the war between the Lacedæmonians and Messenians, is well known.

Line 1197. *He laid him down before the shrine — and slept!*

Herodotus relates of Cleobis and Bito, Argive brothers, that on a festival of Juno they themselves, in default of oxen, drew the chariot of the priestess, their mother, forty-five stadia to the temple. Amidst the shouts of an admiring multitude, their grateful parent asked of the gods the best boon mortals could receive, wherewith to reward the piety of her sons. The young men fell asleep within the temple, and woke no more.

Line 1203. *No Moschus sang a requiem o'er his clay!*

That exquisite effusion of Moschus over the grave of Bion, his 'vatis amici'—his brother in poetry and love—will occur to the reader's recollection.

Line 1229. *Then comes the* SELAH—*and the voice is hush'd!*

Respecting this Hebrew word, which is found 'seventy times in the Psalms, and three times in Habakkuk,' Calmet observes: 'One conjecture is, that it means the end or a pause, and that the ancient musicians put it occasionally in the margin of their psalters, to shew where a musical pause was to be made, and where the tune ended.'

INDEX OF FIRST LINES

[Including the first lines of songs contained in poems and dramas.]

A Grecian island nourisheth to bless, 531.
A heavy heart, Belovèd, have I borne, 219.
A knight of gallant deeds, 104.
A mighty dog with three colossal necks, 475.
A phœnix is a single bird, and synchronous with nature, 531.
A poet could not sleep aright, 128.
A rose once grew within, 169.
A sad man on a summer day, 48.
A Thought lay like a flower upon mine heart, 101.
Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear, 217.
Ah me! what tears my eyes are welling forth, 530.
Ah, tears upon mine eyelids, sorrow on mine heart, 527.
All are not taken; there are left behind, 56.
And Jove's right hand approached the ambrosial bowl, 476.
And, O belovèd voices, upon which, 100.
And Psyche brought to Venus what was sent, 476.
And so an easier life our Cyclops drew, 471.
And so these daughters fair of Pandarus, 481.
And therefore if to love can be desert, 216.
And wilt thou have me fashion into speech, 217.
And yet, because thou overcomest so, 217.

Back-looking Memory, 47.
Belovèd friend, who living many years, 199.
Belovèd, my Belovèd, when I think, 218.
Belovèd, thou hast brought me many flowers, 223.
Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace, 222.
Because ye have broken your own chain, 423.
Bettine, friend of Goethe, 45.
But only three in all God's universe, 215.
But sovran Jove's rapacious Bird, the regal, 475.
But what is this thou holdest in thine hand, 516.
'But why do you go?' said the lady, while both sat under the yew, 427.

Can it be right to give what I can give, 216.
Could ye be very blest in hearkening, 56.
Curb for wild horses, 516.

Dead! One of them shot by the sea in the east, 446.
Dead! Thirteen a month ago! 425.
Dear my friend and fellow-student, I would lean my spirit o'er you! 118.
Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers, 156.
'Do you think of me as I think of you, 178.
Dost thou love me, my Belovèd? 212.
Dost thou weep, mourning mother, 116.

Each creature holds an insular point in space, 198.
Emperor, Emperor! From the centre to the shore, 410.
Enough! we 're tired, my heart and I, 433.
Eve is a twofold mystery, 14.
Experience, like a pale musician, holds, 100.

Face to face in my chamber, my silent chamber, I saw her, 200.
Fair Amy of the terraced house, 433.
Farewell, farewell, mine own familar one, 529.
Fast this Life of mine was dying, 211.
First time he kissed me, he but only kissed, 222.
Five months ago the stream did flow, 209.
Florence, Bologna, Parma, Modena, 421.
Free Heart, that singest to-day, 203.
Friends of faces unknown and a land, 443.
From my lips in their defilement, 526.

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand, 215.
God be with thee, my belovèd, — God be with thee! 117.
God, namèd Love, whose font Thou art, 57.
God the Creator, with a pulseless hand, 58.
God, who with thunders and great voices kept, 199.
God would not let the spheric lights accost, 199.
Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas, 188.
Grief sat upon a rock and sighed one day, 206.

He bent his head upon his breast, 442.
He listened at the porch that day, 209.
Hear our heavenly promise, 95.
Hearken, hearken! The rapid river carrieth! 38.
Hearken, oh hearken! let your souls behind you, 71.
Her azure eyes, dark lashes hold in fee, 197.
Her hair was tawny with gold, her eyes with purple were dark, 417.
Her soul was bred by a thorn, and fed, 448.
How do I love thee? Let me count the ways, 223.
How he sleepeth, having drunken, 155.
How high Thou art! our songs can own, 57.
How joyously the young sea-mew, 49.

I am no trumpet, but a reed, 209.
I am listening here in Rome, 431.
I classed, appraising once, 174.

I count the dismal time by months and years, 103.
I dwell amid the city ever, 35.
I have a name, a little name, 60.
I have a smiling face, she said, 202.
I have been in the meadows all day, 99.
I heard an angel speak last night, 423.
I heard last night a little child go singing, 224.
I lift my heavy heart up solemnly, 215.
‘I left thee last a child at heart, 19.
I lived with visions for my company, 219.
I love thee, love thee, Giulio, 445.
I may sing ; but minstrels' singing, 54.
I mind me in the days departed, 34.
I mourn for Adonis — Adonis is dead, 468.
I never gave a lock of hair away, 218.
I plant a tree whose leaf, 20.
I see thine image through my tears to-night, 220.
I stand by the river where both of us stood, 174.
I stand on the mark beside the shore, 192.
I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless, 99.
I thank all who have loved me in their hearts, 223.
I think of thee ! — my thoughts do twine and bud, 220.
I think that looks of Christ might seem to say, 101.
I think we are too ready with complaint, 102.
I thought once how Theocritus had sung, 214.
I will paint her as I see her, 182.
I would build a cloudy House, 179.
If all the gentlest-hearted friends I know, 102.
If God compel thee to this destiny, 101.
If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange, 221.
If I were thou, O butterfly, 204.
If old Bacchus were the speaker, 184.
If thou must love me, let it be for nought, 217.
If Zeus chose us a King of the flowers in his mirth, 470.
In the pleasant orchard-closes, 149.
In the ranks of the Austrian you found him, 442.
Indeed this very love which is my boast, 217.
Is it indeed so ? If I lay here dead, 219.
It is a place where poets crowned may feel the heart's decaying, 58.

King of us all, we cried to thee, cried to thee, 439.
Know the holy councils, King, to their inmost number, 528.

Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping-knife, 219.
Light human nature is too lightly tost, 102.
Little Ellie sits alone, 186.
Love ! Lady diademed with honor, whence, 530.
Love, Love, who once did pass the Dardan portals, 479.
Love me, Sweet, with all thou art, 208.
Love you seek for, presupposes, 213.
Loving friend, the gift of one, 163.

Methinks we do as fretful children do, 199.
Mine orbèd image sinks, 78.
Mortal man and woman. 75.
Mountain gorses, ever golden, 187.
My dream is of an island place, 32.
My future will not copy fair my past, 98.
‘*My future will not copy fair my past,*’ 223.
My letters ! all dead paper, mute and white ! 220.
My little doves have left a nest, 51.
My little son, my Florentine, 416.
My lonely chamber, next the sea, 166.
My midnight lamp is weary as my soul, 82.
My own Belovèd, who hast lifted me, 220.
My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes, 218.
My song is done, 13.

Napoleon ! — years ago, and that great word, 160.
Nay, if I had come back so, 434.
'Neath my moon what doest thou, 39.
Nine years old ! The first of any, 195.
Now, by the verdure on thy thousand hills, 103.
‘Now give us lands where the olives grow,’ 450.

O be not angry with me, gentle house, 529.
‘O dreary life,’ we cry, ‘O dreary life ! ’ 102.
O health to me, royal one ! if there belong, 525.
O health to thee ! new living car of the sky, 525.
O Lady of the passion, dost thou weep ? 529.
O living Spirit, O falling of God-dew, 532.
‘O maiden ! heir of kings ! ’ 55.
O my deathless, O my blessed, 522.
O Rose, who dares to name thee ? 207.
O Seraph, pause no more ! 1.
O thou fierce God of armies, Mars the red, 61.
Observe how it will be at last, 440.
Of all the thoughts of God that are, 48.
Of English blood, of Tuscan birth, 210.
Of writing many books there is no end, 254.
Oh, take me, thou mortal, — thy LIFE for thy praiser ! 530.
Oh, wilt thou have my hand, Dear, to lie along in thine ? 213.
Oh, would ship Argo had not sailed away, 517.
Oh, would the serpent had not glode along, 517.
Oh, yes ! they love through all this world of ours, 223.
On the door you will not enter, 181.
‘Onora, Onora,’ — her mother is calling, 108.
Out of my own great woe, 482.
Over the dumb Campagna-sea, 444.

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make, 222.
Peace, peace, peace, do you say ? 438.
Put the broidery-frame away, 171.

Rejoice in the clefts of Gehenna, 67.

Said a people to a poet — ‘ Go out from among us straightway ! 149.
Say over again, and yet once again, 218.
Seven maidens 'neath the midnight, 29.
She has laughed as softly as if she sighed, 207.
She rushed to meet him : the nurse following, 479.
She was not as pretty as women I know, 430.
Since Spirit first inspir'd, pervaded all, 499.

Since without Thee we do no good, 61.
Sleep, little babe, on my knee, 426.
Sleep on, baby, on the floor, 183.
Sleep, sleep, mine Holy One! 43.
So the storms bore the daughters of Pandarus out into thrall, 481.
Some yearn to rule the state, to sit above, 525.
Speak low to me, my Saviour, low and sweet, 99.
Sweet, thou hast trod on a heart, 426.

Take me as a hermit lone, 532.
Teresa, ah, Teresita! 445.
Thank God, bless God, all ye who suffer not, 99.
The book thou givest, dear as such, 50.
The cypress stood up like a church, 428.
The Earth is old, 40.
The face of all the world is changed, I think, 216.
The face which, duly as the sun, 436.
The first time that the sun rose on thine oath, 221.
The gentle River, in her Cupid's honor, 473.
The golden-hairèd Bacchus did espouse, 478.
The poet hath the child's sight in his breast, 198.
The Pope on Christmas Day, 420.
The Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word, 101.
The seraph sings before the manifest, 98.
The shadow of her face upon the wall, 197.
The ship went on with solemn face, 201.
The shroud is yet unspread, 54.
The simple goatherd between Alp and sky, 197.
The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise, 218.
The sword of sorrow whetted sharp for me, 65.
The war of Greece with Persia's haughty king, 485.
The wind sounds only in opposite straits, 197.
The woman singeth at her spinning-wheel, 101.
Then Bacchus' subtle speech her sorrow crossed, 477.
Then Jove commanded the god Mercury, 476.
Then mother Ceres from afar beheld her, 474.
Then Psyche entered in to Proserpine, 475.
Then Psyche, weak in body and soul, put on, 472.
'There is no God,' the foolish saith, 167.
There is no one beside thee and no one above thee, 214.
They bid me sing to thee, 53.
They say Ideal beauty cannot enter, 198.
They say that God lives very high, 206.
They sit unknowing to these agonies, 520.
Thou bay-crowned living One that o'er the bay-crowned Dead art bowing, 46.
Thou comest! all is said without a word, 221.
Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor, 215.
Thou indeed, little Swallow, 481.
Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man, 103.
Three gifts the Dying left me, — Æschylus, 200.
To rest the weary nurse has gone, 23.
To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers from the sun, 140.
Tremble, spectator, at the vision won thee! 529.
True genius, but true woman! dost deny, 103.
Two sayings of the Holy Scriptures beat, 100.

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart, 215.

We are born into life — it is sweet, it is strange, 175.
We cannot live, except thus mutually, 198.
We have met late — it is too late to meet, 212.
We overstate the ills of life, and take, 103.
We reach the utmost limit of the earth, 450.
We sow the glebe, we reap the corn, 205.
We walked beside the sea, 49.
Well-beloved and glory-laden, 522.
What are we set on earth for? Say to toil, 100.
What can I give thee back, O liberal, 216.
What meditates thy thoughtful gaze, my father, 529.
What shall we add now? He is dead, 441.
What time I lay these rhymes anear thy feet, 52.
What was he doing, the great god Pan, 437.
What wilt thou possess or be? 519.
Whatever eyes seek God to view His Light, 525.
What 's the best thing in the world, 434.
When Bacchus first beheld the desolate, 476.
When from thee, weeping I removed, 53.
When I attain to utter forth in verse, 104.
When Jesus' friend had ceased to be, 58.
When last before her people's face, her own fair face she bent, 158.
When our two souls stand up erect and strong, 219.
When some belovèd voice that was to you, 99.
When some Beloveds, 'neath whose eyelids lay, 56.
When Victor Emanuel the King, 440.
When we met first and loved, I did not build, 222.
When ye stood up in the house, 164.
Where are my wingèd words? Dissolved in air, 518.
Which is the weakest thing of all, 60.
While Psyche wept upon the rock forsaken, 473.
Who will unclose our Homer's sounding lips, 524.
Whoever looketh with a mortal eye, 524.
With stammering lips and unsufficient sound, 98.
With the same heart, I said, I 'll answer thee, 221.
Wordsworth upon Helvellyn! Let the cloud, 98.

Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear, 221.
'Yes,' I answered you last night, 149.
Yet love, mere love, is beautiful indeed, 216.
You love all, you say, 432.
You remember down at Florence our Cascine, 415.
You see this dog; it was but yesterday, 196.
You 'll take back your Grand-Duke? 419.

INDEX OF TITLES

[The titles of major works and of general divisions are set in SMALL CAPITALS.]

Adequacy, 103.
Amy's Cruelty, 433.
Apprehension, An, 102.
August Voice, An, 419.
Aurora and Tithonus, 479.
Aurora Leigh, 254.

Bacchus and Ariadne. 478.
Battle of Marathon, The, 485.
Bereavement, 56.
Bertha in the Lane, 171.
Best Thing in the World, The, 434.
Bettine, To, 45.
Bianca among the Nightingales, 428.
Boyd, Hugh Stuart; his Blindness, 199; his Death, 199; legacies, 200.
Brown Rosary, Lay of the, 108.

Calls on the Heart, 203.
Casa Guidi Windows, 224.
Castruccio Castracani, the Sword of, 440.
Catarina to Camoens, 181.
Change upon Change, 209.
Cheerfulness taught by Reason, 102.
Child Asleep, A, 155.
Child's Grave at Florence, A, 210.
Child's Thought of God, A, 206.
Chorus of Eden Spirits, 71.
Chorus of Invisible Angels, 75, 95.
Christmas Gifts, 420.
Claim, The, 206.
Complaint of Annelida to False Arcite, The, 65.
Confessions, 200.
Consolation, 56.
Comfort, 99.
Court Lady, A, 417.
Cowper's Grave, 58.
Crowned and Buried, 160.
Crowned and Wedded, 158.
Cry of the Children, The, 156.
Cry of the Human, The, 167.
Curse for a Nation, A, 423.
Cyclops, The, 471.

Dance, The, 415.
Daughters of Pandarus, The, 481; another version, 481.
De Profundis, 436.
Dead Pan, The, 188.
Dead Rose, A, 207.
Dedication to John Kenyon, Esq., 254.
Denial, A, 212.
Deserted Garden, The, 34.
'Died . . . ,' 441.
Discontent, 102.
Doves, My, 51.
Drama of Exile, A, 67.
Duchess May, Rhyme of the, 140.

Early Rose, A Lay of the, 169.
Earth and her Praisers, 40.
Essay on Mind, An, 499.
Exaggeration, 103.
Exile's Return, The, 53.

False Step, A, 426.
Finite and Infinite, 197.
First News from Villafranca, 438.
Flower in a Letter, A, 166.
Flush, My Dog, To, 163.
Flush or Faunus, 196.
Forced Recruit, The, 442.
Fourfold Aspect, The, 164.
Futurity, 100.

Ganges, A Romance of the, 29.
Garibaldi, 442.
Greek Christian Poets, Some Account of the, 513.
Grief, 99.

Haydon, B. R., On a Portrait of Wordsworth by, 98.
Heaven and Earth, 199.
Hector and Andromache, 479.
Hector in the Garden, 195.
Hemans, Felicia, 46.
House of Clouds, The, 179.
How Bacchus comforts Ariadne, 477.
How Bacchus finds Ariadne sleeping, 476.
Human Life's Mystery, 205.
Hymn ['Since without Thee we do no good'] 61.
Hymns: —
  I. A Supplication for Love, 57.
  II. The Mediator, 57.
  III. The Weeping Saviour, 58.
  IV. The Measure, 58.

Inclusions, 213.
Insufficiency, 104, 214.
Irreparableness, 99.
Island, An, 32.
Isobel's Child, 23.
Italy and the World, 421.

Juvenilia, 485.

Kenyon, John, Dedication to, 254.
King Victor Emanuel entering Florence, April, 1860, 439.
King's Gift, The, 445.

Lady Geraldine's Courtship, 118.
Lady's 'Yes,' The, 149.
Lament for Adonis, 468.
Last Poems, 424.
Last Translation, The, 482.
Lay of the Brown Rosary, The, 108.
Lay of the Early Rose, A, 169.
L. E. L.'s Last Question, 178.
Lessons from the Gorse, 187.
Life, 198.
Life and Love, 211.
Life's Progress, A Rhapsody of, 175.
Little Friend, The, 50.
Little Mattie, 425.
Look, The, 101.
Look, The Meaning of the, 101.
Lord Walter's Wife, 427.
Lost Bower, The, 149.
Love, 198.
Loved Once, 174.
Lucifer, Song of the Morning Star to, 78.

Man and Nature, 48.
Man's Requirements, A, 208.
Marathon, The Battle of, 485.
Margret, The Romaunt of, 20.
Marriage of Psyche and Cupid, 476.
Mask, The, 202.
May's Love, 432.
Meaning of the Look, The, 101.
Measure, The, 58.
Mediator, The, 57.
Memory and Hope, 47.
Mercury carries Psyche to Olympus, 476.
Mind, An Essay on, 499.
Mitford, Mary Russell, To, 52.
Morning Star, Song of the, to Lucifer, 78.
Mother and Poet, 446.
Mountaineer and Poet, 197.
Mourning Mother, The, 116.
Musical Instrument, A, 437.
My Doves, 51.
My Heart and I, 433.
My Kate, 430.

Napoleon III. in Italy, 410.
Nature's Remorses, 448.
Night and the Merry Man, 39.
North and the South, The, 450.

Ode to the Swallow, 481.
On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon, 98.
Only a Curl, 443.

Page, The Romaunt of the, 104.
Pain in Pleasure, 101.
Parting Lovers, 445.
Past and Future, 98.
Patience taught by Nature, 102.
Perplexed Music, 100.
Pet-name, The, 60.
Poems before Congress, 410.
Poems of 1844, 67.
Poems of 1850, 191.
Poet, The, 198.
Poet and the Bird, The, 149.
Poet's Vow, The, 14.
Portrait, A, 182.
Powers', Hiram, 'Greek Slave,' 198.
Prisoner, The, 103.
Prometheus Bound, 450.
Proof and Disproof, 212.
Prospect, The, 199.
Psyche and Cerberus, 475.
Psyche and Pan, 473.
Psyche and Proserpine, 475.
Psyche and the Eagle, 475.
Psyche and Venus, 476.
Psyche gazing on Cupid, 472.
Psyche propitiating Ceres, 474.
Psyche wafted by Zephyrus, 473.

Queen Annelida and False Arcite, 61.
Question and Answer, 213.

Ragged Schools of London, A Song for the, 431.
Reed, A, 209.
Rhapsody of Life's Progress, A, 175.
Rhyme of the Duchess May, 140.
Romance of the Ganges, A, 29.
Romance of the Swan's Nest, The, 186.
Romaunt of Margret, The, 20.
Romaunt of the Page, The, 104.
Rosalind's Scroll, The Words of, 19.
Rose, Song of the, 470.
Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point, The, 192.

Sabbath Morning at Sea, A, 201.
Sand, George, To, a Desire, 103; a Recognition, 103.
Sea-Mew, The, 49.
Sea-Side Walk, A, 49.
Seraph and Poet, The, 98.
Seraphim and Other Poems, The, 1.
Seraphim, The, 1.
'Since without Thee we do no good,' 61.
Singing, A Song against, 53.
Sleep, The, 48.
Sleeping and Watching, 183.
Some Account of the Greek Christian Poets, 513.
Song against Singing, A, 53.
Song for the Ragged Schools of London, A, 431.
Song of the Morning Star to Lucifer, 78.
Song of the Rose, 470.
Sonnets from the Portuguese, 214.
Sonnets: —
  Adequacy, 103.
  Apprehension, An, 102.
  Bereavement, 56.
  Boyd, Hugh Stuart; his Blindness, 199; his Death, 199; Legacies, 200.
  Cheerfulness taught by Reason, 102.
  Comfort, 99.
  Consolation, 56.
  Discontent, 102.
  Exaggeration, 103.
  Finite and Infinite, 197.

    Flush or Faunus, 196.
    Futurity, 100.
    Grief, 99.
    Heaven and Earth, 199.
    Insufficiency, 104.
    Irreparableness, 99.
    Look, The, 101.
    Love, 198.
    Life, 198.
    Mountaineer and Poet, 197.
    Meaning of the Look, The, 101.
    Mitford, Mary Russell, To, 52.
    On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon, 98.
    Pain in Pleasure, 101.
    Past and Future, 98.
    Patience taught by Nature, 102.
    Perplexed Music, 100.
    Poet, The, 198.
    Powers', Hiram, Greek Slave, 198.
    Prisoner, The, 103.
    Prospect, The, 199.
    Sand, George, To; a Desire, 103; a Recognition, 103.
    Seraph and Poet, The, 98.
    Soul's Expression, The, 98.
    Substitution, 99.
    Tears, 99.
    Thought for a Lonely Death-Bed, A, 101.
    Two Sayings, The, 100.
    Two Sketches, 197.
    Work, 100.
    Work and Contemplation, 101.
Soul and Body, 510
Soul's Expression, The, 98.
Soul's Travelling, The, 35.
Sounds, 38.
Stanzas ['I may sing: but minstrel's singing'], 54.
Student, The, 52.
Substitution, 99.
Summing up in Italy, 440.
Supplication for Love, A, 57.
Swallow, Ode to the, 481.
Swan's Nest, The Romance of the, 186.
Sword of Castruccio Castracani, The, 440.

Tale of Villafranca, A, 416.
Tears, 99.
That Day, 174.
Thought for a Lonely Death-Bed, A, 101.
To Bettine, 45.
To Flush, my Dog, 163.
To George Sand, a Desire, 103; a Recognition, 103.
To Mary Russell Mitford, 52.
Two Sayings, The, 100.
Two Sketches, 197.
TRANSLATIONS, 450.
Translations: —
    From 'Achilles Tatius,' attributed to Sappho, 470.
    From Æschylus, 450.
    From Anacreon, 481.
    From Apuleius, 472.
    From Bion, 468.
    From Euripides, 479.
    From Heine, 482.
    From Hesiod, 478.
    From Homer, 479.
    From Nonnus, 476.
    From Theocritus, 471.

Valediction, A, 117.
Vanities, 56.
Victor Emanuel, King, entering Florence, April, 1860, 439.
Victoria's Tears, 55.
View across the Roman Campagna, A, 444.
Villafranca, First News from, 438.
Villafranca, A Tale of, 416.
Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus, The, 43.
Vision of Poets, A, 127.
Void in Law, 426,

Weakest Thing, The, 60.
Weeping Saviour, The, 58.
Where 's Agnes? 434.
Wine of Cypress, 184.
Wisdom Unapplied, 204.
Woman's Shortcomings, A, 207.
Words of Rosalind's Scroll, The, 19.
Wordsworth, On a Portrait of, by B. R. Haydon, 98.
Work, 100.
Work and Contemplation, 101.

Year's Spinning, A, 209.
Young Queen, The, 54.

RENNER LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER
ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ELGIN, ILLINOIS

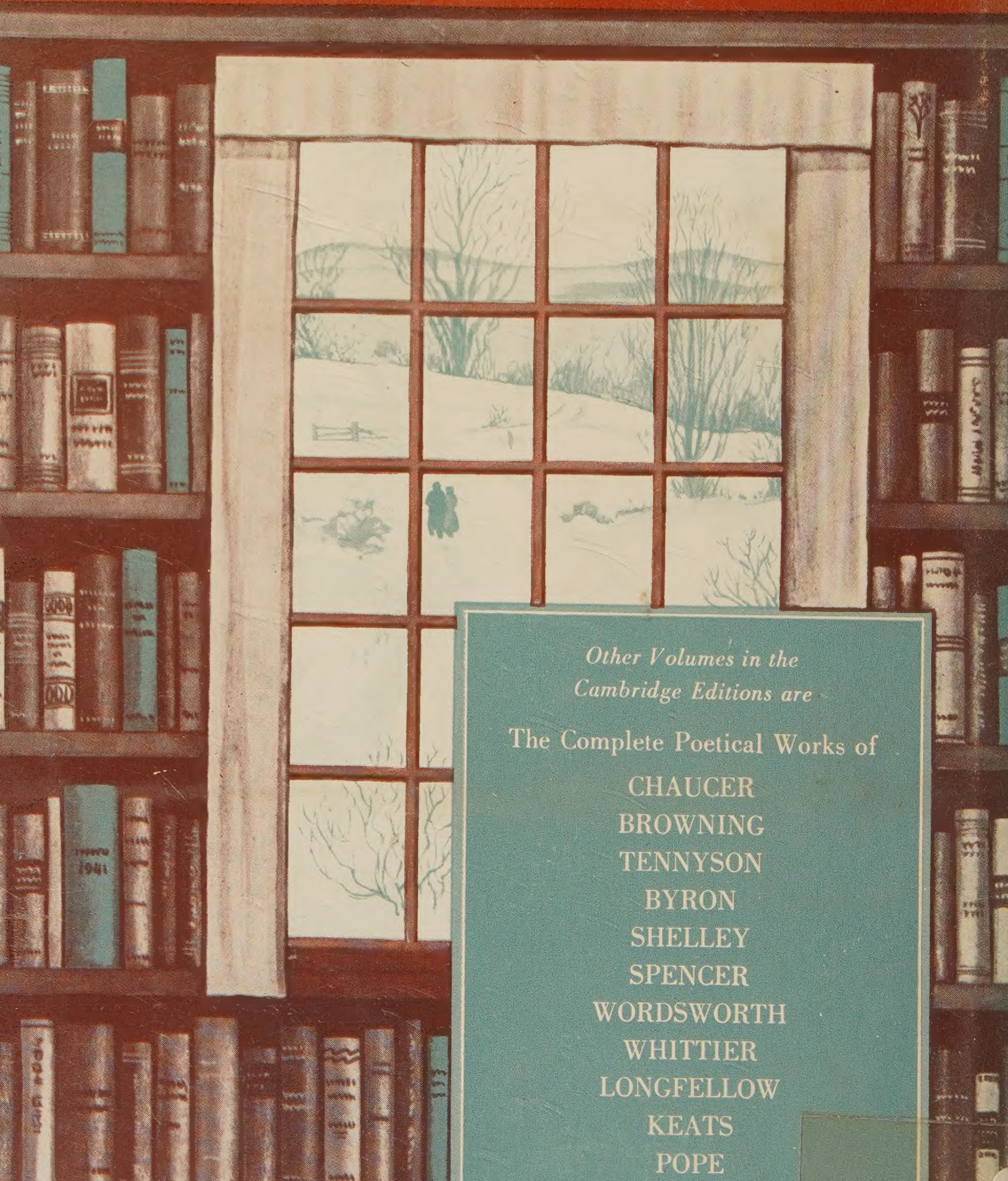
Cambridge Editions

The Cambridge Editions have hitherto been composed of complete one-volume editions of major English and American poets. The careful and scholarly editing attached to each volume has made the Cambridge name a byword in household and school libraries.

Now, after long consideration, the publishers have decided to add a number of prose writers to this imposing gallery of Cambridge poets. Each prose volume will contain the selected works of one man, chosen because his writings have had a continuing impact on present-day thinking. By the same token, contemporary writers will not be considered for this series, until there has been time for a later generation to test the value of what they wrote.

Outstanding scholars, with a demonstrated ability to write, will select and edit these editions with a comprehensive introduction and biographical sketch of each author. THE WORKS OF THOREAU, selected and edited by Henry Seidel Canby, is the first volume to be published. It sets the standard for each succeeding volume that will occupy a place on the Cambridge bookshelf.

Every volume will appear in a binding of attractive and enduring proportions, designed for the bookshelf rather than the pocket.



Other Volumes in the
Cambridge Editions are

The Complete Poetical Works of
CHAUCER
BROWNING
TENNYSON
BYRON
SHELLEY
SPENCER
WORDSWORTH
WHITTIER
LONGFELLOW
KEATS
POPE

English and Scottish Ballads
The Works of Thoreau

M01 40001 05511